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CONVERSATIONS

OF

JESUS CHRIST

WITH

REPRESENTATIVE MEN.

BY WILLIAM ADAMS, D. D.,

PASTOR OF MADISON SQUARE CHURCH, N. Y.

Sermons
Jesus Christ · Teacher

NEVER MAN SPAKE LIKE THIS MAN. JOHN 7:46.

290 p. 19 cm.

New York;
PUBLISHED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

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NOTE.

In the preparation of the several chapters of this volume, use has been made of the best commentators, ancient and modern, on the sacred text. To have made reference in every case, to the author consulted, would have been greatly to encumber the page. His one purpose being to interpret the Word in the simplest and most practical manner, the author takes this method of acknowledging in general terms his obligations to all those critical helps which it is the habit and privilege of every student of the Scriptures to consult.

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CONTENTS.

I. Nicodemus: The Rationalist ---------- PAGE 7

II. The Woman of Samaria: The Obtuse Sensualist ------ 35

III. The Young Ruler: The Moralist ---------- 63

IV. The Intelligent Scribe: Not far from the Kingdom of God ---------- 91

V. Zaccheus: A True Convert ---------- 115

VI. The Centurion of Capernaum: The Modest Man of Faith ---------- 149

VII. Martha of Bethany: The Mourner ---------- 179

VIII. Pilate: The Vacillating Man of the World ---------- 205

IX. Mary Magdalene: Love Rewarded ---------- 237

X. Peter: The Restored Penitent ---------- 265

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There is this advantage in studying the personal conversations of our Lord: that we are sure of the directness and appropriateness of his words. As the several persons with whom he conversed may be considered as the representatives of as many different classes, it is the same for us as if we, in the variety of our own characters, had enjoyed the privilege of a private interview with the Son of God.

In an animated conversation, how much of meaning is there in look, and tones, and pauses even, which never can be printed. In reporting or interpreting a conversation, it is important that we understand, so far as possible, these unwritten expressions; and this must be done by a careful study of the different parties, and the circumstances in which their conversation was conducted.

There is a *general impression* produced by a conversation, which is not fairly represented by any one or two of its expressions. Though it be true that any one of the assertions which fell from the lips of Christ in any one of his recorded conversations contains thought enough for volumes; yet sometimes it is well, instead of isolating such

remarks, to study their connection, and observe how each is related to the total impression which is left by the whole interview.

In every conversation of Christ, there is some one point which must be considered as the key to the whole. Particular expressions may be hard to understand; certain words may have a depth of meaning beyond our power to fathom; nevertheless, in the connection in which they were used, they contribute to a general impression which it is impossible to evade.

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

NICODEMUS:

THE RATIONALIST.

JOHN 3:1-21.

I.

NICODEMUS:

The Rationalist.

This conversation of Christ with Nicodemus presents the whole of *revelation in miniature;* and if we believe and conduct according to the words which are here uttered by our Lord, we shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

Christ came to Jerusalem to observe the Passover, the first after his public entrance upon his ministry. This was the time at which this conversation was held. "Now when he was in Jerusalem, at the Passover, on the feast-day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did." What miracles these were, we are not informed. They must have been of a notable character, for they made a great impression; nevertheless, the account of them has not been transmitted. Yet one thing quite remarka-

ble is recorded of those who at this time were greatly affected by the miracles of Christ—"Many believed in his name" because of them; but "Jesus did not commit himself unto them," because he knew them all, and all that was in them. This describes them as believers of a certain kind. They were not true, cordial, and earnest believers, for it is expressly said that Jesus did not treat them as such. Our Lord never held himself at a distance from a sincere believer; but here were some who believed only to a certain degree, and who, therefore, did not reach at once the recognition of full discipleship.

Imagine, now, one of this general class going to his home after he had himself seen some of these miracles of Christ. He is a Pharisee—a ruler of the Jews. He is in the highest official position, a "teacher of the law," and as we may suppose, quite advanced in years. He is no trifler, and no mocker. Others of his order may have curled the lip or shot out the tongue in disbelief and derision of the whole affair; but what he had seen had taken too strong a hold upon him to be

disposed of in this manner. The wonderful works of Christ certainly transcend nature and man. Moreover, the person who had performed them had assumed a most authoritative mien, actually driving out from the temple, which he called "his Father's house," the buyers and sellers and money-changers, which no other authority had ever interfered with; and strange sayings had he uttered before the people, of a most incomprehensible meaning.

'Who is this person? To what order of beings does he belong? He discourses of religion. His words and his works all appear to be related in some way to the coming kingdom of God. Who can he be?' So is it that Nicodemus ponders the matter as he walks thoughtfully to his house; and when the shadows of night had fallen, he makes a resolve to seek out Jesus, and inquire what all these things import. He is not decided enough to go by day, encountering the "world's dread laugh;" yet timidity in him differs every way from timidity on *our* part, after accumulated evidence; for he was curious to ascertain the

truth, not wishing to involve himself in a mistake. This mental condition of Nicodemus is of more importance to be borne in mind than his outward description; because the words of Christ, as of one who "knew what was in man," were addressed directly to his interior consciousness; and if we do not understand this aright, we fail to catch the pertinency of what was said to him, and in Christ's conversation there will be many an ellipsis which we cannot supply.

Behold, then, this man coming to Christ by night! Thoughtful, but cautious, revolving how much he should admit, and how much hold in reserve; yet a teacher himself, and bent on searching the matter from his *rationalistic position.* This quality of *rationalism*—this desire and purpose to know and judge of every thing according to his own understanding—is the characteristic of Nicodemus, and so the key to the entire conversation. He believes more than he is willing to avow. He begins his salutation with an admission, and closes it with a most "cautious inconsistency." He is very far from being the miserable "time-

server" which some have supposed; yet before the conversation closes, he is reproached by our Lord for not giving more of expression to his honest convictions. He is quite in earnest, and honest in his way; but it is just such a combination of *rationalism* and *materialism* as we might suppose would characterize a thoughtful Pharisee, which describes the man who, in the darkness of night, now seeks out our Lord. He was already a believer, but not a believer of the right sort. The miracles of Christ had carried the outposts of the citadel, but the whole man had not assented. Every thing which is said by our Lord throughout the whole interview is adapted to meet this semi-persuaded *rationalistic* condition of mind, by the presentation of truths which were designed to test the counter-quality of faith. "*How?*" "*how?*" is the interrogatory of the ruler. "*Believe,*" "*believe,*" is the response of Christ. By his own admission of being convinced by miracles, Nicodemus puts himself in a position where it was right and wise that he should be pressed with this duty of *faith* as a logical necessity. If he confessed,

as he did, that the person with whom he talked acted with Divine sanction and power in his indisputable miracles, then nothing could be more consistent or appropriate to this confession than that he should believe the testimony of the Being whose words were corroborated by such preternatural wonders. This is the point, as we shall see, to which he is pressed by every word which was uttered by Christ: *belief* in Christ himself, as the most rational deduction from belief in his miracles. There is no talking at random. There is nothing here which is loose and disjointed. From the beginning to the end of the conversation, the design of our Lord is to develop a simple faith in his own person, on the part of a man who admits that his convictions were carried by the miracles he had seen. If so much, why not more? Miracles admitted, faith is the most rational sequence that can be conceived. Therefore is it that our Lord at every utterance holds up those great objects of faith which together form the Christian creed and the Christian life.

Let us suppose that Nicodemus, as he drew

near to the place where Christ was—we know not where it was, whether in doors or without—is seriously revolving what he shall say, what apology he shall make for seeking the interview, how much he shall admit concerning the claims of the Man he is about to visit, and how much he shall hold in reserve, through fear of committing himself too far.

At length he stands in the presence of Christ. His salutation is respectful, courteous: "Rabbi, we know"—*we* know; would he conceal his personal convictions and intentions behind a general admission, as though he represented his ecclesiastical order?—"that thou art a Teacher come from God."

Every word is guarded and well weighed. "Come from God;" the expression in the original is very significant; it is used only in regard to the Messiah. That He is the Messiah, he does not assert; yet the thing which he intends to ascertain is, what are the relations of this Man to the Messiahship and to the Kingdom of God. John the Baptist had announced him to be the Sent of God. He touches the outer border of the subject; he

cannot bring himself to admit more—than "*Teacher*"—"for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except—*except*—GOD *be with him.*" Every thing is shaded off and toned down to the extreme of caution. Nothing here like the round and hearty admission of Nathanael: "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God." There is inconsistency; there is reservation; there is mental timidity. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a *Teacher;*" is this all which he can admit of one who asserts himself to be the Messiah? "a Teacher come from God; for no man can do the miracles which thou doest, except God be with him."

This salutation accomplished, this cautious admission made, the doctor of the law stands not altogether at his ease under the calm and solemn eye of the young Rabbi. Let us remember what we are advised of in the preface of the narrative, that "He knew what was in man," and we shall perceive that there was nothing abrupt or inappropriate in the words which first were uttered by our Lord. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a

man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." We wonder at first why Christ should have said this rather than any thing besides. But nothing could have been more pertinent to the state of mind of the man by whom he was accosted. Half-convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, yet not brave enough to admit it, his secret intention was, to ascertain His relations to the coming kingdom of which he himself, as a Pharisee, was in some sort an official representative and agent. Nothing that ever fell from the lips of man could have been more pertinent than this reply of Christ: "You have addressed me as a *Teacher* related to the divine kingdom; then verily, verily, I *say unto you:* You have said that no *man can do* these miracles, *except* God be with him; let me say that *no man can* see the kingdom of God, *except* he be born again." How many of the very words which Nicodemus used are turned upon him with a point and emphasis which went to the very heart of things. Nicodemus begins with a complimentary acknowledgment concerning Christ. Christ replies in words which send the thoughts of the

Pharisee to himself, into his very heart. 'If you would know who I am, and what I am to teach, and what I am to do, the first essential thing is within thyself. We must not invert the alphabet, and begin at omega — at results and conclusions; the kingdom of God which I came to establish is not external, but interior and spiritual, consisting of gracious dispositions, of love, and joy in the Holy Ghost; and if one is to share in it at all, he must be brought into affinity with it by a change in himself.' Nothing is wanting here to make the connection and complete the sense. The divine Teacher — recognized as such, addressed as such — asserts a lesson which is at once the simplest and the sublimest. Nicodemus is acquainted only with an external kingdom of God; so that the first words of Christ reverse all his old habits of thought. 'My teaching and my testimony are not about visible wonders, but interior affections; not so much about what I can do and have done, as what *you are*, and you, in your own soul, must become.' "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

It is in the use of figurative language that our Lord begins, and out of it he emerges gradually into a simpler teaching. "Born"—"born again," or "born from above"—it matters not which idea we adopt in the use of the word ἄνωθεν—"*born* afresh," says Nicodemus, What can this import? "*How* can a man be born when he is old? *Can* he be born a second time as he was born at the first?" Whatever may have been the real thought and feeling of Nicodemus on the subject, his words imply that he understood this language of Christ in its literal sense, as descriptive of some physical birth. It is the rationalistic, materialistic spirit which moves his lips. "Verily, verily," is the rejoinder of Christ, "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." 'Except he have that interior birth, which is symbolized by baptism and realized by the Divine Spirit, he has no part in the kingdom of God.' Here is an advance in the words of the great Teacher. He defines the sense of the figurative expression of *birth* before used, so that it may not be left

to inference. "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit." 'That which is begotten and born carries within itself the nature of that from which its being was derived. Flesh is born of flesh; spirit is born of spirit. I speak not of being born again of the flesh. The body is born but once; but my words intend another birth, which is produced by the Divine Spirit.' So far our Lord goes in the way of explanation. "*How* can a man be born?" asked the rationalist. How wisely our divine Master leads him on to that boundary of knowledge, where faith will be absolutely requisite. He explains the meaning of his figurative terms, "*born again.*" He intends a moral and spiritual regeneration which corresponds to the spiritual forces by which it is engendered. Spirit is born of spirit; and so Christ teaches a birth which is by and of the Spirit; and then, as if the very word suggests an illustration which prescribes the limit to all marvelling and cavilling—the same word in the Greek meaning *spirit* and *wind*—he refers the listener to a most admirable analogy. 'Hark!

the night-wind is sighing around us; the leaves of the trees and the tendrils of the vine are tremulous before its breath; yet these effects of the wind are all that you can see; the wind itself is invisible, but its work is evident.' "The wind bloweth where it listeth; and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Our Lord would help the faith of the ruler by a very simple analogy. Having defined his own words, just what he meant by the new birth, a regeneration of the human soul by the Divine Spirit, he teaches him that concerning this invisible Power, its rise and its method, we know nothing, judging of it only by its visible effects.

Here was the place for Nicodemus to give his assent; but his rationalism takes on a shade of arrogance which draws from Christ a gentle reprimand. "Nicodemus answered and said unto him, '*How* can these things be?'" This was but the repetition of the question which had been already answered, and which therefore should not have

been asked again. Having answered it before as it could only be answered, our Lord does not pursue the topic farther, having informed the ruler, in answer to his "*How*," that the *mode* was mysterious and incomprehensible. But "*how*" is the question of Nicodemus again. "Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?'" This is not a taunt; but it is just such a reproof, just such a turn of words as prepares for the heart-thrust which follows: "You are a master, a teacher in Israel, the representative of that order which presides over the national religion; and you have come to me as a Teacher, and you acknowledge me as such; "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, we speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness." Recall the admission which was made by Nicodemus in the very first words which he uttered in this interview: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a Teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." This admission is now turned upon

him with the greatest force: 'If you acknowledge me as a teacher having a Divine commission, then you should accept my testimony, instead of pressing your inquiries into the domain of mystery which by a familiar analogy I have shown you to be withdrawn from your understanding; you ought rather to give it your assent on the simple ground of my affirmation and my testimony, as an accredited witness come from God. Men are believed when they are acknowledged as competent witnesses; give me your faith in regard to that which I have affirmed, though you do not yet understand the mode of its working.' Faith is demanded of the Pharisee as a logical result of his own premises. What is incomprehensible and unseen by him, is known and seen by Christ; and it is right that he should trust in His testimony as the only one competent to testify concerning these spiritual mysteries.

A new subject is now introduced, and pressed most earnestly and cogently to the close of the interview. Nothing more is said about the new birth; enough has been said upon

that subject—all that could be said. It has been affirmed to be necessary ; it is explained to be of a spiritual nature, wrought by the Spirit in a manner which to us is invisible. This is enough. This is the point where, so far as regards what is beyond our own senses and understanding, faith in a divinely-commissioned teacher is both necessary and reasonable. When, therefore, a rationalistic mind urges its "how," "*how* can it be," giving rein to its own marvellings and unbelief, it is right that it should be met with the charge of unbelief together with its own guilty tendency. Just this is what such a mind should understand. There is a point where it should believe. There is a boundary to the understanding, and when it is reached, FAITH IS THE CONTINUATION OF REASON. This is the subject which, coming in so naturally, so necessarily, is now held up to the end of the conversation. This, nothing but this: simple faith in the personal testimony of Jesus Christ as the only one who has come down from heaven to inform the world of those things which are beyond all earthly knowledge. And this language of Christ is so for-

cible, so earnest, so reasonable, that there is no reply from Nicodemus; so that some critics have been in doubt where the conversation with the man ends, whether with the 13th or the 21st verse. Rather would we understand that Nicodemus was so impressed with these words that he could do nothing but listen, and so these several utterances of Christ are continuous and uninterrupted to the 21st verse, all in one strain, converging to one point, with a stress and an emphasis which increase to a most tremendous application. The beginning is a reproof of unbelief; and it is concerning believing and disbelieving the testimony of Jesus Christ concerning himself, that the whole of the remaining words find their true explication.

'It is not your knowing, your understanding, but your *receiving* in true faith what is affirmed by myself, the Christ of God, commissioned and accredited to teach and redeem the world.' With this key in hand, nothing is necessary but to read the words which follow, since they interpret themselves: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, I speak that which I

do know, and testify that I have seen, and ye *receive not my witness.* If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" Sometimes we are disposed to render this expression, "*earthly things*," as referring to these analogies of *birth* and the *wind;* common occurrences, which nevertheless imply so much which is mysterious and invisible and incomprehensible as to rebuke rationalistic incredulity; but whether we refer the words to these natural objects, or to that side and aspect of regeneration which comes into view and has it occurrence here upon the earth, the force is the same—since the contrast is between things which occur on earth and things which belong exclusively to heaven, of which no knowledge could be derived by any process save the testimony of the living Person who, as a witness, is now discredited by the skeptical Nicodemus. 'No man hath ascended up to heaven with power to see and testify of its arcana but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven.' From this point all centres in this personality

of the witness. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever *believeth* in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that *believeth* on him"—mark how this act of faith is magnified as the great necessity of our condition and being—"is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not *believed* in the name of the only begotten Son of God." No positive act of retributive penalty is necessary to curse a soul that is without faith; it is cursed already, by its own suicidal exclusion from blessings which are as free and ample as the light of heaven. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world." Think not that these words are disconnected. "*Rabbi*, we know that thou art a Teacher come from God," so the interview began; and thus it

closes: "This is the condemnation"—'At the beginning I said that a man's love—his heart must be changed to have affinity with the kingdom of God'—"that light is come into the world; and men *loved* darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." A psychological explanation of which is subjoined: "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." Was it so, as our Lord gave this last and inimitable description of the nature, causes, and doom of unbelief, that the two walked together, out into the darkness of the night, and so, as from the wind, the simplest and most natural illustration was furnished? Nothing to heighten the dramatic effect of the scene is appended; but, as we have seen, the train of conversation is continuous, closing with an application which must have grappled the soul of Nicodemus with a power which he could not resist.

The workings of his mind as he returned to his home are not described. The effect of

the conversation, for the best of reasons, is not recorded. We incline to the hopeful opinion; and the deep, perhaps saving impression made by this conversation with Christ is proved by the two occasions, the only two mentioned, when Nicodemus made a sort of confession in honor of Christ; the one before his own class, the Pharisees, when he took the part of Christ then absent: "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" subjecting himself to the taunting retort that he too must be a contemptible Galilean; and the other when, as the companion of Joseph of Arimathea—again was it secretly with both of them—he brought his hundred weight of myrrh and aloes, to embalm the crucified body of Jesus. May we not hope that tender tears fell upon that sacred body as he was engaged in the gentle and pious act.

Is not our assertion verified, that this conversation contains a miniature representation of the whole Christian revelation—all that we must do, and all that we must believe? First of all is it required that there should be

a thorough change of affection in every one who would be personally related to the kingdom of God; that no external observance or privilege can be substituted for this; for if our Lord had intended by the new birth only a reformation of the outward life, he asserted nothing which was not already known to Nicodemus, and even to the wiser heathen; nothing, surely, which could have caused surprise or excited incredulity. There is nothing obscure, nothing which calls for the special exercise of faith in a requirement so obvious and so reasonable. But there is a point where that which is obvious shades off into that which is obscure; where the understanding reaches its own horizon, and faith must come into vigorous exercise. But faith is not an unreasoning credulity. It has for its basis the evidence of the advent of one who came from heaven for the very purpose of testifying, informing, revealing, redeeming, and saving; and trust in him is the perfection of reason.

This controversy between *faith* and *philosophy*, as conducted in scholastic debate, has been long and able and spirited. The great

metaphysician of Scotland, Sir Wm. Hamilton, whose consummate learning and unrivalled acuteness will be disputed by no man, whether his opinions are embraced or rejected, denying our ability to acquire any positive knowledge of the infinite and the absolute, has made *faith* the basis of *philosophy* as well as *religion*. He and his disciples have asserted the necessary limitations of human thought. We do not enter here upon that scholastic discussion; but plain enough, *faith* is the very life of our religion. This religion concerns itself with objects which are above and beyond our knowledge. It discloses the very heart of God. It reveals those heavenly mysteries which no wit of man ever could reach. Heights inaccessible, depths unfathomable, distances immeasurable, extending into infinity and eternity, are all revealed to us by Him who came down from heaven to be the light and the life of man. Not without credentials did he come. Never did he demand the faith of men without giving them proof of his Divine authority. This given, weighed, and accepted, faith, simple, childlike faith in his every word,

becomes our wisdom and our necessity. Thus is it that in our religion every thing arranges itself about the living form of the Son of God. Having disclosed to us why He came, what He has done, and what He will yet do, faith in Him is the dictate of reason, the one necessity of our being, our only wisdom and safety. We cannot work our way through this life, in contact with the commonest objects and the most familiar occurrences, births and deaths, winds and tides, light and darkness, without encountering mysteries which demand our faith. That faith is the first lesson which childhood learns, and it is the last and highest which age and experience ever acquire. Plain enough, our destiny for eternity depends upon a simple belief in Him who came down from heights which we cannot scale, and across ocean-depths which we cannot traverse. 'Say not, who shall go up into heaven, or who shall go over the sea to find out knowledge?' for the Revealer has come; "the word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that if thou wilt believe in Jesus Christ, thou shalt be saved." So simple, so necessary, so rational

is this faith, that where it is wanting, there must be some moral obliquity which causes the defect. Come not under the condemnation of *loving* darkness rather than light. The only qualification for knowing divine things is to love them. For knowing the sciences and arts of men, many other things are requisite; but to know Christ, and to see the light of his revelation, we have only to aspire after a filial temper. What a condemnation this for an immortal man, not to believe in Him who is the incarnation of truth and love, and who came for the sole purpose of conferring upon us infinite favors!

Surely *we* cannot be skeptical as to the fact that such a Saviour was born into the world, and that he gave such proofs of his Divine commission; for the world is full of the monuments and evidences of his advent. Then let us give him our faith, fuller and heartier than we ever gave to any friend on earth. Take his outstretched hand, and trust him; believe his words; believe his doctrines; obey his directions; follow where he leads; commit your soul to him while you live, for that

soul's peace, even as you must commit it to him when it is going out from the body into an unseen and unknown futurity; for in that mystery of eternity there is no light save that which shines from the face of Christ, and no object about which your thoughts can gather, on which your heart can rest, save the Son of God, before whom you stand to-day, whose words you now hear, urging you to give him your confidence, that you may be saved.

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA:

The Obtuse Sensualist.

JOHN 4:1-42.

II.

THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA:

The Obtuse Sensualist.

While all the personal conversations of our Lord with different individuals deserve our careful study, this interview with the woman of Samaria commends itself to our notice for many and peculiar reasons. When He commissioned his apostles, on their first itinerancy, he limited their range to the house of Israel. With this conversation of his own begin the religious labors and influence of Christ outside of that original boundary, giving us our first conception of the universality of his religion, as adapted to every nation and tribe and person of the human family.

Before we listen to the conversation itself, conducted with such skill and success on the part of our Lord, a few things should be premised of a general import and instruction.

The very first thing which we are led to notice is, the ease and naturalness with which our Lord introduced the conversation. There was nothing about it mechanical. It is the speech of one intent on doing good at every opportunity; and the words flow from his full heart as waters run from a full fountain. There is a perfunctory method of entering upon religious conversation which promises but little good. It is the discharge of a duty, rather than the utterance of the heart. It is said to be the prerogative of poetic genius to associate analogies with common objects. It is the higher prerogative of religion, to use familiar objects and common occasions for lighting up and enforcing the sublimest spiritual truths. Let the heart be replenished with religious conviction and experience, and it will be easy for men to converse on the things of God, without so much as one prompting from the mere sense of duty.

Another thing suggested by the cursory perusal of this chapter is, the satisfaction which a religious soul is sure to derive from every attempt to persuade and benefit others.

Before this conversation began, our Lord sat by the well, weary and faint in the sultry noon. His disciples had gone to the village to buy meat. Such were the refreshment and vigor which he received in the act of imparting truth and life to a human soul, that when his disciples returned from their errand, and pressed him to eat, he declared to them that he had meat to eat which they knew not of. Interpreting the words in a literal sense, they supposed that during their absence some one had brought him food. Not only was he without bread, but it does not appear from the narrative that even the request which he made for water to drink had been complied with. Nevertheless he was, in body and soul, as one invigorated and satisfied with meat and drink; and his own explanation is, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Activity in the kingdom of God augments the power of spiritual life, and deepens the consciousness of religious realities. The expression of Christian sentiments invigorates the experience, and imparts a pleasure which exceeds all physical refreshment.

Another lesson arrests the eye in its most superficial glance over this narrative.

To a faithful soul, the opportunities of well-doing are always present and immediate. It is the sluggish spirit which would defer the present occasion to some remote season. At the time when our Lord had this conversation, the grain in the fields was in the blade, four months intervening till it would be ripe for the harvest. The spiritual harvest is always ready. Pointing to the crowds of people who were hastening to see him after the report of the woman with whom he had talked, our Lord assured his disciples that there was no occasion for waiting, since the fields were white already for the harvest. Wherever there are living men, especially such as are disposed to listen or inquire, there are opportunities and inducements for religious speech; and one may thrust in his sickle, and bind his sheaves, and rejoice over a harvest.

What results often follow a single conversation, is an additional thought suggested by these incidents. The woman with whom Christ spoke made such a report as stirred the whole town,

and induced them to entreat Christ to abide with them some days; which he did. It is reserved for a future disclosure to acquaint us with all the results of the visits and conversations of those memorable days. Nor does the matter terminate here. In the book of the Acts, when the apostles began their march, we find the region of Samaria prepared for signal scenes, which filled it with joy. Christ, in this early interview with one person, was the Sower scattering seed, which other hands in other times should reap in golden harvests. From this incident let us learn that a wise word is a prolific power; what is said in the ear of one may make thousands think; an imperial power, widening its circles over the surface of life, of most blessed promise for the future. A sermon preached to a thousand people ought to be preached at least a thousand times, every hearer becoming himself a preacher, and repeating and applying the truth to others.

These lessons are too valuable to be left ungathered, but they are only prefatory to the conversation itself, to which we now turn.

Leaving Judea for a season, for the comparative quiet of Galilee, our Lord takes the direct route which led through Samaria. His journey was accomplished on foot. At the sixth hour, corresponding to our twelfth, just at noon, he comes to the well which tradition assigns to the patriarch Jacob. He is wearied by the heat and the length of the dusty road, and seats himself by the curb of the well. Resting here alone, for his disciples had left him for a season, a woman from the town comes to draw water. He immediately accosts her with the request to give him to drink from the utensil which she had brought. Detecting by his dress and the softness of his dialect that he was a Jew, and not a Samaritan, she expressed surprise that he could or would make such a request of her; for the animosity and the contempt of the Jews for the Samaritans was a notorious feature of the times. Sublimely indifferent, as we should be also, to all such national distinctions, conscious only that he was to deal with a human soul, and mainly desirous of acquainting that soul with its own wants and leading it to himself, our Lord does

not even notice the topic which the woman had introduced; but giving a personal force to his words, immediately replied: "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

Though the sublimest truths were conveyed in this figurative language, the woman had not the most remote idea of their import. She understood them in the most literal sense. She supposed that they referred to spring-water, cool and fresh and sparkling, such as she had come to draw from the well. She looks at the stranger who had a moment before asked her for a draught of water, and who now assures her that if she had only asked of him, he would give her an abundance of water. "Why, sir, I see you have nothing to draw with; you have neither rope nor pitcher, and the well is very deep, how could you give me fresh water? Have you a better well than this, which our father Jacob gave us, of which he and his children and his cattle were accustomed to drink?" There does not appear to

have entered her mind the least shadow of the spiritual meaning of the words spoken by Christ. She thought of nothing but well-water, and some more convenient or expeditious method of drawing it up than she had used. She judged of every thing by her senses. She comprehends nothing, imagines nothing be yond.

Intending to lead her on, if possible, to a perception of his meaning, our patient Master answered and said: "Whosoever drinketh of this water, shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." Truths are here, at once the very simplest and the very sublimest. Surely it is not possible that any one could misinterpret such language; yet so obtuse, earthly, and sensual is this person, that she attaches no other ideas to this promise than that which belongs to the use of common water. Verily she understood this stranger to speak of water which, once taken, would prevent all future thirst, and so save her from

the troublesome task of coming every day to the well. She said unto him, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw."

Though it seems impossible to penetrate this vulgar mind with spiritual truth, yet our Lord does not terminate the conversation abruptly and impatiently. With a kind and lenient condescension which looks hopefully at one issue, he immediately changes his method of approach. Though in this case, as with his conversations with his disciples and with Nicodemus, he dropped germinant words, afterwards to be recalled and made plain and potent, yet now he does not pursue his spiritual discourse, but employs a new and different mode of startling her dormant soul. It is a profound truth in human psychology, that the conscience, that faculty or act of the mind by which it judges of the right or the wrong of our own deeds, is the only power by which you can quicken a sense of the spiritual, not merely in the obtuse and unthinking, but even in many others of a more delicate organization. The conscience belongs to the spirit, and not

to sense. It touches not the plane of the visible and the tangible, but the ideas of God, and duty, and accountability, and demerit, and retribution; and these are all of the spirit. He who enters the soul by this door of the conscience, may pass on through all its halls and chambers, from one spiritual truth to another. Of what avail was it for the Son of God to discourse of Himself as giving living water unto the world, if there was no thirsting in the soul which would desire it, or appropriate it, or relish it? To excite this thirst, to suggest to this ignorant and obtuse woman her own guilt and want, Christ lays his hand at once upon her conscience. Ceasing from all imagery and parallelisms, our Lord directs her to go and call her husband. She replies that she has no husband. The words which follow were like a spark falling into a magazine. This woman was living in shameful sin. Jesus informed her that he was well acquainted with her whole life. He knew the history of her former marriages and divorces, and the character of her present connection: 'Thou hast had five husbands, who are sepa-

rated from you either by death or divorce, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband.' It was as when the sun strikes full and strong on the face of an obelisk thickly inscribed with dusky and illegible characters, each word, each letter made to confront the blazing eye of day. The woman saw that all the secrets of her life were disclosed. Her conscience was roused from slumber; her dead soul felt the first sense of vitality in the form of self-reproof. She found herself under the eye and within the power of One who arraigned her before God. There was no misunderstanding of what Christ said now. Neither was there any hiding of herself from the charge which, as by one stroke of lightning, lighted up all the darkness of her soul. "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." There must have been a pause and silence ensuing upon these words. Our Lord did not break it, but allowed what he had said to do its work most thoroughly. No other word from him interfered with the activity of conscience in this miserable woman as she stood there abashed and convicted in the presence of One who,

with preternatural eye, read the whole of her heart and life.

When the silence was broken, it was by the woman herself, in words which have been variously interpreted: "Our fathers worshipped in *this* mountain—Gerizim—and ye, the Jews, say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." Most expositors interpret this affirmation as an act of dexterity, a woman's tact, in diverting the conversation from a subject which had become painful to herself. Stung with a sense of shame, she breaks off the topic of remark which had so unexpectedly cut into her heart, and adroitly alludes to a politico-theological question as the means of extricating herself from embarrassment. This may be so. If it were so, it would agree with the habit of some when touched in the quick by the sharp fidelities of truth. But I cannot bring myself to believe that this was the true attitude and intention of her mind. Had her purpose been mere evasion and diversion, we cannot suppose that Christ would have answered her as he did; for he proceeds to speak as he would to one

inquisitive for the truth, and not one attempting to trifle with it or escape from it. What hinders us from believing that this reference of the woman to the hereditary religion of her fathers, in contrast with the worship of the Jews, was the incipient act of a repenting soul, following immediately upon the consciousness of her shame? Is this the first incitement of the *thirst* which shall lead her to Christ, and enable her to understand what he has already uttered concerning living and exhaustless waters? This was a Jewish Prophet, who had read and exposed her heart; and if she was moved by a right spirit, the most natural thing that could be conceived would be for her—alluding to notorious differences of opinion by which she was likely to be distracted; to ask for the right way, the place, and the mode in which she might find those waters of life. That this was the undertone of her mind and words would appear from the reply of Christ, who, instead of reproving her for her levity and garrulousness, with an increase of condescension and gentle earnestness, proceeds at once with the utterance which is pertinent to a

thoughtful, not a superficial mind. Reproved by a Jewish prophet, she is secretly revolving, we may suppose, whether it will be necessary for her, in search of the help she needs, to leave the religion of her fathers, and go over to that of the Jews. He whose words were so sublime before, takes this uninformed, but now awakened mind, to a point of perspective which is far *above* all earthly politics and disputes, where she and we may learn the personal relations of the soul to God: "Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Mark, there is here no relaxing of the truth concerning the way of salvation. In the very act of instructing a now sensitive

and inquiring mind in its critical acts, teaching it a sublime indifference to the mere externals of place and form, Jesus still insists on the divine superiority of the religion which was committed to the Jews, the salvation which was to be unfolded through his own Messiahship. There is nothing here akin to the "absolute religion" of which the modern rationalist prates, discarding all definite belief, and dissolving all distinctions into a universal haze. In the very act of demolishing partition-walls between things external and formal, our Lord holds the mind steadfast to the one form of faith which is revealed of God, which concentrates all upon his own person, as the only means of introducing the soul of man to the life of the spirit—the life of God. Worship, the external act of a religious observance, may be so indefinite and uninformed as to be of no value; but "*salvation is of the Jews.*" *Salvation!* a most pregnant word, indicative of the revelation which gleamed on the eye of the dying Jacob; the perspective point which commands and interprets the whole of the Old Testament, and which unfolds itself in that

gospel which is designed for all the world. Let us not fail to observe, that in the very act of asserting independence of all matters of mere form and place, our Lord affirms most explicitly the exclusive divinity of that revelation which, committed at first to the hands of Israel, was destined to expand itself into a redemption spiritual and universal.

How little our divine Teacher depends upon mere "*intellectualism*," the "aristocracy of culture," is evident from the manner in which he applies the sublimest of all truths to this uneducated woman. The highest of all truths are also the simplest. Epic poems are but the arrangement of alphabetic characters in new forms. The substance of all knowledge is here. Here is the alphabet with which we must begin, capable of being compounded and combined in endless progress. True religion is not external worship in any place or any form; it is the approach of the soul to God, spirit to spirit, in the way which God himself has revealed through Jesus Christ. We can see a deeper meaning in those pellucid words of Christ than was reached by the

eye of this ignorant Samaritan, for subsequent revelations have reflected a stronger light on those great sayings; yet even she knew for certainty that something great and marvellous was promised, for the fulfilment of which she looked to the coming of the Messiah as a solution and a relief. When Christ declared, without any reserve or qualification, "I that speak unto thee am he," he intended to bring this mind, and ours also, to faith in himself as the medium of approach to the true knowledge of the true God. It is not needful that you should go to Jerusalem to worship, nor yet to abide at Gerizim; the true religion, if indeed you inquire for it, is independent of place; it is the life of the individual soul; and it has these two distinctive properties—it is personal, and it is universal. That this act should be one of the heart, performed sincerely and truthfully, is the first requisite; but even this does not exhaust the full meaning of the words, *worship him in spirit* and *in truth;* for the antithesis of these terms, *spiritually* and *truthfully*, is over against those ideas of locality and symbolism by which even the true reli-

gion was once distinguished. The time was when the only Divine revelation was confined to certain places and certain forms. Even then there were worshippers who called on God sincerely and truthfully. But now that Christ has come, the old ideas of place and form and rite disappear. Christ is the Way, the Truth, the Life; and through him, the sum and substance of all revelation, the soul of any man, whenever, wherever he lives, may have the knowledge and fellowship of the Eternal Spirit. The true Holy Place is the soul itself. All other religions before conducted man without; this leads him within, and thus reveals God through Jesus Christ. Here, as in all New Testament teachings, the essential thing is the one Person, the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. As he began with a reference to himself as one that would bestow living waters to every thirsty soul, so he ends by disclosing himself as the only true salvation, the Restorer of the guilty soul to God.

The result of this conversation, let us hope, was the saving of this benighted and miserable woman. So full of wonder and joy was she at

what she heard, that she left her water-pot at the well, and hastened to the city, and reported to the people, that she had encountered a stranger—was he not the Christ?—who had told her all things which ever she did; and many of them believed on him; and yet many more in the city, where he continued awhile. So may we hope that this woman, going forth at noon, frivolous, obtuse, ignorant, and guilty, did indeed, ere the day had gone, begin to drink of living waters; for she had found "*the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*"

We drop the narrative at this point, and concern ourselves now with the weighty truths which it conveys in such a spirited form. As well might we occupy ourselves with criticism upon any old Greek manuscript as on the correct reading of the passage before us, if we did not believe that the latter contains what is essential to our own personal salvation.

"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," said the Son of God in the temple court on the last great day of the feast; and here he affirms, "The water that I shall give

him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." Divested of all that is tropical, the truthful sentiment is, that Jesus Christ, and He alone, can give to the human soul all the relief which it needs, and that which alone can satisfy it for ever.

Have you that thirst already which would dispose you to come to the cooling waters? Perhaps you are suffering already from those compunctions of conscience which our divine Lord, with such exquisite skill, quickened to life in the soul of this unhappy woman. So it may be that some whom I now address suffer many things in their own minds from the memory of their own sins. Perhaps it is so that He who, in his intercourse with men centuries ago, gave such proof of his power over the human conscience; by a word, by a look, by silence even, putting in motion the alarm-clock in the chamber of the sleeping soul, has employed some agency of his own—a sermon, an affliction, the death of a friend, a disappointment in business—to arouse your conscience, and remind you of your guilt, incurring the judgments of God. Or it may be

otherwise. Perhaps there is some sin on your conscience with which you have grown familiar, and to which you have become wonted, as one becomes accustomed to a deformity or a dull pain, but which operates to blind the eye and deaden the sense to the glorious truth of Christ. You wonder why you have not a clearer perception of the spiritualities of religion. May there not be some personal sin which is like a veil over your soul while we discourse of living waters? Is there not something in your business which you know to be wrong? Possibly you have in your possession property which belongs to others. It may be so that the real reason which keeps you from a most thirsty and refreshing partaking of Christian promises, is the knowledge on your part of some wrong which you have not the courage to confess or the magnanimity to repair. So it may be with some who are living now; that there are secret sins which blunt the sensibility of the soul to that degree that they cannot comprehend when Christ himself speaks of the river of the water of life, and of the bread which came down from heav-

en, and who have need to be warned of their guilt, just as the words of Christ sent conviction and shame to the heart of this Samaritan.

Or, more likely still, have not these words been read by some who have been conscious of unrest and dissatisfaction in the midst of worldly life? They have been reputed as prosperous among men; they have pursued wealth, and obtained it; followed after prizes, and grasped them; devoted themselves to pleasure, and been counted as her happiest votaries; but the very successes which have crowned their life have taught them, as nothing else could, the hollowness of a heart which holds every thing but Christ. Riches have been proved to canker the soul with cares. In the midst of mirth, the confession has been extorted, It is mad; and the fruit, so ruddy and tempting to the eye, has turned to ashes in the hand. Desire is never satisfied by such objects; and their only effect is, to exasperate thirst into a more restless fever. Then comes disappointment itself: reverses, losses, thorns, bereavements—a dusky train, sent, not to mock our misery, but to incite that sense of want

which shall lead the wounded and thirsty soul to living waters.

What is worse than all, can it be that there are souls so dead as to be conscious of no desire after any thing better than they have in this world? Above all who walk the earth, pity not the afflicted, and disappointed, and sorrowful, who yearn and thirst for divine consolation; but pity those who are content with their husks, and whose hearts ache not for their Father's house, with its ample contentment. Pity most profoundly all such as are satisfied with the "pleasures of sin, which are for a season," with no longing after what is invisible and imperishable. That soul is lost for ever whom God leaves to trust to its own cisterns; discovering, in the hour of extremest need, that they are broken and waterless.

To all these varied classes Christ says now, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that talketh with thee, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." We wonder at the stupidity of this uneducated mind, which could not catch

the clew put into her hands, nor avail herself of the auspicious opportunity thrown in her way; but what was her obtuseness, compared with that of many now, who fail to recognize the voice of Christ when he knocks at the door of the soul, and offers his presence, his aid, and his salvation? The woman of Samaria was not the only one with whom Christ conversed on themes of highest import. He accosts every one of us; and all are invited to partake of his fulness. That fountain of which the Hebrew Prophet spoke is sparkling at our feet. Our path is not through arid deserts, our feet blistered by hot sands, and our tongues parched for want of water, distant and inaccessible. This is the day when "living waters go forth from Jerusalem;" "in summer and in winter shall it be." No frost conceals it; no drought exhausts it; perpetual verdure is all around it; and you may come and kneel, and drink, and thirst no more. This is the only thing in the universe of which it is true, that there is no place for moderating desire, and no possibility of disappointment. Every thing else decays, dwindles, disappears. This

deepens and extends the farther you go—the waters rising from the ankle to the knee, to the loins, to the neck, deep enough in which to swim ; an ocean, an element inexhaustible and eternal.

Take counsel of such as, hearing the voice of Christ, have found *peace*. Consider such as, believing his word, have testified, when death was disparting them from all below, that the best existence was before them—an inheritance which fadeth not away. Think of those who, betaking themselves in the hour of need to the Son of God, have been taken by him to that world where they repose in green pastures and beside still waters, in perpetual peace, contentment, and satisfaction. "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a *well* of water, springing up into everlasting life."

Thirsty, weary, dissatisfied in this sultry life, come as you are ; come at once ; come because you are invited ; as you would not do affront to infinite Generosity, come and drink, and live for ever.

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

THE YOUNG RULER:

The Moralist.

MATT. 19:16-22.
MARK 10:17-22.
LUKE 18:18-24.

III.

THE YOUNG RULER:

The Moralist.

It would be difficult to find, in all the evangelists, a passage which demands a more cautious discrimination in its interpretation than those which record the personal conversation of our Lord with the *moralist*, who was honestly depending upon his good works as the means of securing eternal life. If we ascertain the right point of perspective, every thing is plain and consistent. If we mistake our point of view, we are sure to be embarrassed by multiform perplexities. Some superficial readers have been inclined to regard the terms of Christian discipleship here proposed as hard, severe, and impracticable—assuming that it is *Christian* discipleship which is here described and enjoined. Others, misunderstanding the spirit and intent of

the man who seeks this interview with Christ, regard the answer given by Christ as proposing a method of salvation just the opposite from that which is disclosed in other parts of the New Testament—assuming, on their part, that it is a method of *salvation*, distinctively so called, which is here propounded. Is morality of no account in the Christian economy? Did it not, in this instance, provoke the admiration of the Son of God? But how is this to be reconciled with the notion that all our righteousness is worthless in *His* sight who justifies freely by his grace through faith in the Redeemer, and not by works and merit of our own? All these and other similar questions most readily adjust themselves in perfect harmony and consistency when once we have found the right position from which to survey and interpret the whole conversation. The same words may bear very different significations, according to the circumstances in which they were spoken.

Our first object therefore must be, to ascertain those facts which are the key to the interview.

Our Lord was now on his way to Jerusalem for the fourth and last Passover. No sooner had he gone out into the road to prosecute his journey, than one was seen running towards him as if in great eagerness to meet him before he should pass out of the town. His manner indicates the utmost reverence. He kneels before our Lord with most respectful salutation. He is a young man of the very highest social position. He is, we are informed, very wealthy, a ruler, of a most exemplary refinement of character. He was a rare specimen of humanity, in whom met all the qualities of a correct life and official status and large possessions, which made him to the last degree winning and attractive. Scarcely had he risen from his knees, ere he put the question which, introducing the conversation, reveals the attitude of his own mind, and so explains all which follows. "*Good* Master, what *good* thing shall *I do* that I may *inherit* eternal life?" Every word helps us to interpret the character and intention of the man. He is no malicious quibbler, seeking to entangle Christ in his words. Neither does he

resemble the other person with whom he is often confounded, who came to question our Lord in respect to the commandments, and to whom Christ said, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." The two were in very different states of mind, and represent different classes of men. He was evidently a most earnest and honest man. His mind was not upon any thing trivial, but upon the attainment of *eternal life*. He evidently wished and intended to make sure of this noblest end of existence. Regarding this as of the highest importance, as every posture and expression and act indicate, he puts the question which shows at once that he was altogether at fault as to the process of its attainment. This is not the language of the jailor of Philippi—stricken by his conscience—"What shall I do to *be saved?*" not the importunate cry of the men to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost—"Men and brethren, what shall we do?" but it is the inquiry of a man who had set out in the pursuit of eternal life in his own way, which was not the right way, and who asked for further directions along the same line of

exertion. Noble in disposition, elevated in purpose, he has set himself the task of winning the highest of all prizes, a crown of life, in the way of legal perfection; and his wish and expectation most evidently were, that Christ would assign him new tasks and new achievements, by which he might be impelled yet farther and higher in his heavenward career.

The possibility of his doing every thing which insures his perfection he assumes, simply inquiring what other thing he should add to that which he had done already: "What good thing shall I do?" He looked for the mention of some laudable act which would impart new lustre to his ornate character, and stimulate his ambition and his pride and his self-esteem. I do not mean that this young ruler exhibited that form of self-esteem which was the usual characteristic of Jewish Phariseeism, and which was so unlovely and repulsive; for surely, if he had, Christ could not have looked upon him with any regard or admiration. He was no dissembler, but an honest and zealous religionist—whose zeal and

honesty, nevertheless, were expended upon a false assumption: that assumption was, that he could do in the way of personal obedience—he himself—whatever was needful to complete his claim to eternal life. The ideas of imperfection and sin, forcing him to look about for some other method of securing his end do not appear to have entered his mind. He does not ask, what we are accustomed to expect, directions which shall inform us how, as sinners, we may be saved; but what meritorious thing he could do which should advance him to a higher promotion as one without sin, so that he should lay his hand upon eternal life as his own rightful inheritance. It is very essential that we understand most accurately this attitude of mind on the part of the young ruler; for if we mistake here, we misinterpret altogether the intention of our Lord in what he replied, and start ourselves off in a wrong direction. We have, then, the portraiture of a man who is to the last degree refined, accomplished, attractive, who wishes yet further to refine and adorn and perfect himself, so that he may be a splendid specimen of piety,

heaping up new honors for himself as an unblemished moralist, and entering the kingdom of God at last, like a ship under a great show and press of sail, with a most magnificent ovation.

How, then, should we have supposed that our Lord would reply to a person who accosted him with the spirit and language which we have now explained. Those who resolve the gospel of Jesus Christ into a mere system of morality have a somewhat difficult task to explain what follows in this conversation consistently with their premises. They must hold that Christ proposed terms which were very exacting and unreasonable, even that this young man should impoverish himself utterly, that he might win the evidences and rewards of Christian discipleship. Such surely was not the design of Christ. This was, to convince this moralist that he was radically wrong in all his methods and expectations of moral perfection. The evident intention of Christ was, to satisfy him that he could not inherit eternal life by his good-doing, and that it was necessary for him to change his ground, and insert

a new and very different element into all his exertions and expectations. The method in which this instruction was conveyed is the most adroit that could be imagined. It is not in the way of dogmatic assertion. It is not by answering in didactic formula, that all human goodness is imperfect, and needs a supply of mercy and forgiveness—which is the substance of the Christian doctrine. The method chosen by Christ to carry the conviction of the truth into the very centre of the living heart then throbbing before him is superlatively skilful and successful.

"*Good* Master, what *good* thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" "And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, *God.*"

This verse has sometimes been quoted as a disclaimer on the part of Christ of divine attributes and qualities. This comes from taking a particular expression out of its original connection, and so putting upon it a sense which it was never intended to bear. Disclaim his own goodness! deny his own divin-

ity! How would that be pertinent to the occasion? How would that prove an appropriate answer to the question proposed? Besides, what will they do with the dilemma which stares those in the face who construe this remark of Christ as a disclaimer of any kind?

Put in syllogistic form, it would be presented thus: "None is good but God"—"Christ is good;" therefore "Christ is God." Or, "None is good but God; Christ is not God," therefore—shall we give the conclusion an utterance? "*Christ is not good.*"* We mistake if we suppose that this first response of Christ was intended either as an assertion or a disclaimer of any quality or claim of his own; it was intended to touch the very heart of that subject which had been introduced by the first question of the ruler: "Good Master, what *good* thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

This man had an idea of goodness and good-doing which was defective and false. This Christ intended that he should see. That

* *Vide* Stier, I., 283, note.

idea was humanitarian only—from the plane of sense, and not according to the true notion, which is divine. The design of Christ was, to transfer the mind of the questioner from the one idea to the other; to insert into his mind the true, the only true notion of goodness as represented by God himself. There is no evidence that this young man regarded Jesus Christ as any thing more than a human teacher—a prophet sent from God. He addresses him with a form of language common towards such; and his form of salutation, kneeling, was not designed as religious worship, but as the ordinary method of profound respect: "*Good* Master, what *good* thing shall I do?" The first thing needed is that this mind, misled by a false judgment concerning goodness, its own now in possession, its own as purposed to be in future attainments, should be corrected as to this idea of what goodness is. So the reply of Christ is intended most obviously to lift the mind from its humanitarian level to the loftiness of divine perfection: "'Goodness? what good thing shall I do?' What do you mean, my friend,

by *good?* by being good? by doing good? You use the word quite frequently. You used it in the salutation with which you have complimented me; you used it in your first question. If you have started off with the expectation of winning eternal life by your own goodness, it is well to cast an eye before you, and see what goodness actually is." So he directs him at the very outset to the Being who is the only absolute goodness, whom we must resemble if we expect eternal life by affinity of nature, for the purpose of awakening in his mind the conviction that he could not inherit the life and glory of heaven in this method of being good, since our goodness does not extend to God. It is imperfect, and God only is the One absolute perfection.

Here was one who had no true idea of the nature of goodness; and yet, forsooth, he intended to glorify himself by doing good. "*Good* Master," said he, "what *good* thing shall I do?" and the very phrase which he uses in a complimentary epithet and in his introductory question is turned upon him with an emphasis which is intensified to the end of

the conversation. If *goodness* is to be the method of inheriting eternal life, then be sure that you have in you the genuine quality; not that which passes muster in human compliments and human relations, but that which is displayed in the Being and the commandments of the good God—the whole in the way of correcting the mistakes of the mind with which he was dealing, diminishing the self-confidence of him who was misled, and of introducing into his religion an element of repentance in view of defects which needed forgiveness, instead of leaving it in its low and earthly judgments, which were untrue.

That which passes as good among men is one thing. Quite another thing is the goodness which is perfect and divine, and which is expressed in the law of God. If you would do good, God, who alone is absolutely good, must be your Teacher, and his teachings are expressed in his statutes. We perceive the intention of this heart-reading and divine instruction, which was to convince this young man that he had no correct idea of the spiritual nature of goodness, or of that law by which

it was expressed; but that he was satisfied with garnishing his outward life with those moralities which men call goodness. How pertinent and congruous the whole from this point of view: "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said unto him, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: *but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*" The commandments are the reflection and expression of the Being who gave them; and the fulfilling of them is the highest and greatest of all things. "Keep the commandments!" This falls upon the ear of the young man as the very thing for which he had been asking—a new task; expecting, of course, that some new injunction was to be specified, by which his morality would be proved and advanced. "Commandments! *which*, what are they?" "*The* commandments," replied our Lord; "thou knowest the commandments, the decalogue, the moral law: 'Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, defraud not, honor thy

father and thy mother; *and, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*'" As Christ rehearsed the several precepts of the second table of the law—and what follows shows us why these were specified rather than those of the first table—he appended that which was the spirit and the substance of the whole code, "THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF." But this appendix, designed to explain the import of the several commandments, does not seem to have made much impression on the young man, who was quite pleased as this new Teacher repeated those several precepts which fell so familiarly upon his ear, and he answered quickly and promptly, "Master, all these things have I observed from my youth: what lack I yet?" Great was his cheerfulness and satisfaction when he could conscientiously assert that he had abstained from every vice and immorality condemned in the decalogue. While he could make his boast of this in all honesty—he being by the very terms of the description externally moral to the last touch and finish of art—it is certain that he was spiritually blind to the real import of the com-

mandments. Scarcely did he hear the closing of the catalogue, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," which was designed to show that the true keeping of the commandments was in a disposition of the heart, and not in the observance of the letter. The command of the one good God is fulfilled only by that sincere and disinterested and masterly love which is the only true goodness. As the young magistrate, in the consciousness of his untarnished morality, put the question, "What lack I yet?" the Master turned upon him—not with frowns and indignation, but with a gentler expression of mingled love and pity. "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him."

If the narrative and the conversation had stopped just at this point, we might have concluded that, in the judgment of Jesus Christ, there was one who was fitted to grace the kingdom of God by his most admirable morality. But the interview was destined to have a very different termination, as it was designed to convey a very different lesson. The smile of the Saviour's pitiful admiration conveys with it an emphasis; for it shows how

thoroughly moral, according to his own estimate of morality, this young man was, and how attractive he was in his personal accomplishments and deportment, in contrast with the rude and dissolute and vicious transgressor. Even Christ testifies to the beauty and loveliness of this extraordinary morality, which had in it no defect to the eye, that the lesson of the whole incident might be the more pointed and impressive. It was an uncommon specimen of what would be called among men a good life. "What lack I yet?" said he, and that honestly. That one look of love from the face of Christ is the highest reward and encomium which the moralist could reach; but that was only preparatory for the sequel. A question has been asked of the true Master which demands a true answer; and that answer will lay open the heart to its very core: "Yet one thing thou lackest: if thou wilt be perfect, go thy way, and sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, take up the cross, and *follow me.*"

Mark, Christ does not say, "Thou lackest *only* one thing"—but ONE thing thou lackest,

and that is THE WHOLE. Good enough, admirable enough, so far as it goes, measured on your humanitarian and visible plane, is your law-keeping; but in the eye which reads the heart and inspects the invisible dispositions there is a defect which vitiates the whole. You are utterly wanting in that love which is the keeping of the whole law. To convince him that it was so—for this purpose only—our Lord presents to him a test. He did not assail him with severe charges; he did not tell him that in heart he was an idolater; but he proposed to him that he should do a certain thing—had he not asked what he should do to inherit eternal life?—which he could not do if he was wanting in that love for his neighbor which is equal to the love of one's self; and this proposal was made for the very purpose of satisfying him that there was in his heart a radical defect. Say not that the terms of Christian discipleship are severe. These are *not* the terms of Christian discipleship. Christ does not demand that every man who becomes *his* disciple should sell all that he has, and reduce himself to poverty. You say that

it was very natural that this proposal should excite grief, and would be disposed of just as it was in this case. Granted; just what we believe. This would be the natural, the common mode of disposing of such an exaction. Just what our Lord intended to convey to this inquirer. This man had wished to make himself or prove himself *perfect*. To prove to him that his goodness was *not perfect*, according to the spirit of the commandment, he gave him a direction such as could be obeyed only by a perfect love. You affirm that you would certainly have reluctated at such a proposal. Undoubtedly you would, because you know that your love is not perfect, and so not equal to the sacrifice. God's goodness is infinite, because his love is infinite; and the Son of God made sacrifices for man such as could have been made by love only.

Say not then that Christ puts a hard yoke and binds a heavy burden on his disciples; it is the man himself who has come under the pressure, by undertaking to accomplish and demonstrate his own perfection. To convince him that he is not perfect, and that of himself

he cannot do all which is implied in perfect obedience to the law of love, he is bidden to do what he feels himself unequal to perform; and all this that he might change his ground and his endeavor, and assume a place in the discipleship of Christ: "Come and *follow me*."

When the young man heard these words, his countenance fell; he was very sorrowful, sad at heart, for he had great wealth. Had the probe touched the heart? Had he discovered that he loved himself more than his neighbor? Was he convinced for the first time that between him and that perfection which is demanded in the law there was an immense chasm? If he had just now and here, when the kind fidelity of Christ had thus disclosed himself to himself—if he had only confessed and acknowledged the defect of his legal obedience, and asked for forgiveness, a new element would have entered into his life, which would have insured salvation upon Christian terms, in distinction from that legality which he had prescribed for himself. He turned, sad and depressed, and went away. The issue of the case is veiled from our eye. Did he sub-

sequently, under these new teachings, conscious of imperfection, return to God with penitential prayer, and so prove himself a disciple of the Saviour? We know nothing of his history after this; but as the eye of Christ followed him as he went away, he turned to his disciples—who, as the sequel shows, were in danger of mistaking the incident—and gave them a most impressive teaching concerning the idolatry of wealth.

But this is a new subject, and quite a different phase from that which we have now contemplated. Let us then follow up the results of this conversation in one lesson. That lesson is, that no man can inherit eternal life on the basis of a legal obedience. We are not to be promoted to celestial honor and blessedness because of our personal and meritorious goodness. That goodness, to constitute a claim by inheritance to eternal life, must be not only honest and cordial, but absolutely *perfect*. It must come up to the full standard of the commandment. The moment you attach to it the quality of imperfection, of defect, however slight, that moment you introduce into

your religion a new idea, a new element, which must be met with its own correlative of forgiveness; but this is the *Christian* method, in distinction from legality.

Shall we then conclude that morality—understanding by the term this unblemished and attractive exterior of life—is valueless? or that a thorough obedience to law is not to be prosecuted by every Christian disciple with a most noble emulation? This is the worst of all infatuations. Two extremes have been of common occurrence: to undervalue morality, however earnest, on the plea of Christian faith; and to exalt and honor secular morality at the expense and in contempt of Christian faith.

"It is what they see of the laxity, the imbecility, the instability of many religionists, which indurates secular men in their impiety, and leads them, with an avowed contempt of religious principles, to rest the motives of their conduct upon the lower ground of expediency, utility, honor, and a regard to reputation. On the other hand, the lax religionist, seeing as he does that secular princi-

ples often produce a sort of consistency and virtue of which he knows himself to be entirely destitute, and finding that *his* doctrine of faith, in *his case*, has no efficiency of a similar kind, arrives tacitly at the conclusion that the honor, truth, integrity, candor, ingenuousness, and self-command in which some worldly men excel are nothing better than 'worldly virtues' or false semblances of goodness with which a 'spiritual man' should have little or nothing to do."*

A Christian well instructed in the New Testament holds to a golden mean which involves no contradiction or inconsistency. Morality is not the precedent condition of saving faith, but it is always the result, the fruit, and the evidence of Christian faith.

Propose the question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" in the spirit of this Jewish ruler, with the purpose and expectation of achieving your own immortal honor, without the ideas of defect and forgiveness and faith in a Saviour, and a greater task is before you than to tread the zodiac of the universe—

* Sat. Evg., p. 168.

even to travel the star-paved highway which leads on and on and upward to the absolute perfection which exists in the Supreme. And this must be without one deflection or diversion or weariness or halting or mistake. Conscious that we cannot establish our perfect goodness after this manner, we acknowledge our imperfection, and so are bidden to trust, as sinners, in the grace of the Redeemer.

What now? Is this Christian faith an exemption from all morality and a license for all sins? Is the act of believing in the Saviour the paralysis of virtue? or the power which stimulates it to a greater vitality, supplying it with a more potent force? We cannot mistake our answer to this question. Saddened by the honest conviction that we cannot stand the criterion of an unmixed and Divine perfection, we take our place, as grateful penitents, in the discipleship of that Master who forgives freely, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light; and because forgiven and reenforced by new motives and helps beyond all that can be found in ourselves, we go forth to a new obedience, to the careful practice of all

Christian virtues. We aim to obey the higher injunctions, not that we may be promoted as those who are without sin, but because we are forgiven as sinners, and faith in the Redeemer has admitted us to a new domain of freedom and gratitude and love. Eternal life does not depend upon our perfection; but because it does depend upon the grace of Christ and the love of the Spirit, that love shall prompt us to emulate perfection.

"Come and follow *me*," says Christ. All his conversations with men terminate with proposing his own person as the object of faith. We do not put ourselves before Christ, but after him. We do not stand in precedency of the Saviour, but follow in his steps, as those who at once trust in his help and imitate his life.

The review of this conversation of our Lord with an accomplished moralist will greatly instruct us if we are reminded of this revealed certainty, "that by the deeds of the law no flesh living shall be justified"—that we are justified freely by the grace of Christ: and because of this we are impelled, prompted, en-

couraged to follow that holiness which shines upon us down through those gates of Paradise which are opened—to the weeping eye of penitence—by the hand of the Redeemer. "Come and follow me," says Christ. Yes, we will—not as those who are proved to be perfect; but that forgiven and blessed we may go on unto perfection. "Come and follow me," says Christ. Yes, we will, for thou hast bought us with a price, and we are not our own.

"Talk they of morals? Oh, thou bleeding Lamb,
The grand morality is love of thee."

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

THE INTELLIGENT SCRIBE:

Not far from the Kingdom of God.

MATT. 22:34-40.
MARK 12:28-34.

IV.

THE INTELLIGENT SCRIBE:

Not far from the Kingdom of God.

In the New Testament we have not only a series of precepts, but a moving panorama of living characters, who come in contact with Jesus Christ, propose their questions, receive their answers, and pass along, giving place to others; but their questions and answers do not pass away with them; they remain for ever, the record of spiritual truths in a living form.

Here was a man who was pronounced by our Lord to be "*not far* from the kingdom of God." If, then, we shall be able to understand the very posture of the mind here introduced and described, we shall very readily solve the question whether we ourselves are near to or remote from the kingdom of heaven.

The individual here referred to was a

scribe, an ecclesiastical lawyer, learned in all questions pertaining to the religion of his country. As it appears from the narrative itself—and the method of procuring the true stereoscopic impression of the whole scene is, to collate the language of the several evangelists who have recorded it—he was a listener to what had occurred in Christ's conversation with other persons. The Herodians, designing to entrap our Lord, had just asked him a question concerning the payment of tribute to the Roman government. Immediately after this, the Sadducees proposed to him another question concerning the resurrection. Both parties received an answer—but an answer so smooth, so adroit, so discreet, that they were transfixed on their own dilemmas. They were baffled and silenced, so that they did not dare to ask him any more questions. The scribe, who next appears in view, a spectator of the scene, seems to have been struck with the peculiarly neat, wise, and unanswerable language of our Lord. It evinced an accurate knowledge of the Scriptures. Wishing to ascertain more of this extraordinary stranger,

and to improve the opportunity for solving certain matters which had long been upon his own mind, he now steps forward and proposes a question to our Lord for himself. His purpose in so doing, we must believe, was honest: his disposition was good. Matthew, indeed, says, that the lawyer asked the question "*tempting* him." But a very slight acquaintance with the language of the New Testament satisfies one that the word thus rendered is used in a good sense as well as a bad. If in some instances it obviously imports a malignant design, such as solicitation to evil, or ensnaring one in mischief; in others it is used just as obviously in the general sense of proving one for the purpose of ascertaining his opinions and character. Beyond all question this was the intention of the individual now before us. There was no malign purpose in his heart; for had there been, our Lord never would have said that he was near to the kingdom of God. Convinced that the person who, in his hearing, had just before refuted the Herodians and the Sadducees so cleverly must have still further knowledge of

the Scriptures, and wishing himself to obtain information pertinent to his own profession, he also asked a question which was intended to develop the character of the man in whose presence he stood. The question proposed was this: "Master, which is the first commandment of all?" To redeem this inquiry from the appearance of frivolity, it should be borne in mind that this was a point long mooted by the Jewish teachers, whether the law of sacrifice, or the law of circumcision, or the law of the Sabbath, or the law of the phylacteries should have the precedence. Our Lord answered the question thus proposed by reciting sentences which were written in the phylacteries themselves—the compendium of the *moral* law. Taking no notice whatever of those disputed questions concerning the *ceremonial* law, he rehearsed at once the substance of the divine statute which epitomizes all morals: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment." And the scribe exclaimed: "Master, thou hast answered *well*."

Our English word *well* does not exhaust the meaning of the Greek καλως—beautifully, excellently—conveying the high satisfaction which was felt with that reply. It was an answer which corresponded to his own judgment. What are forms and ritualisms, burnt-offerings and sacrifices, in comparison with the temper of the heart, the right quality of the affections? When our Lord perceived the heartiness, intelligence, and discretion with which the scribe responded to his own saying, he said unto him, "*Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*" He affirmed not that this man was *in* the kingdom, but that he was *near* to it—far nearer than if his manner, his disposition, his opinions had been other than they were. Few words need be expended in proving that the expression, "kingdom of God," signifies, in this connection, that state of blessed security which is revealed and proffered to us in the gospel. It indicates that condition of things which is by Jesus Christ, insuring man's highest welfare for this life and for the life which is to come. Whether the person here conversing with Christ actually entered

within the kingdom, receiving the gospel and the salvation of his soul. we are not informed. No farther mention is made of his case; he is not introduced again in the sacred annals; the curtain drops just at this time and place; so that we cannot even conjecture whether, improving his advantages, he passed on yet farther, even within the precincts of safety, or, withdrawing his foot, retreated to a greater distance from the kingdom of God. The point of greatest interest to us is, that which is disclosed in this one interview and conversation. If this individual evinced a condition of character which brought him into a critical nearness to the kingdom of heaven, it is of great concern to each and all to know what that condition was, that we may measure our own relations to the redemption of the Son of God.

Our wisdom therefore is to ascertain, if it be possible, what there was peculiar to the individual thus described, which drew forth this judgment from our Lord, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." The only source of knowledge which is open to us in reference to this inquiry is, the narrative itself.

The first thing of a hopeful character in the state of this individual was, that he was *disposed to press an honest and earnest inquiry after truth.*

We are constrained to believe that this was the case from all the attendant circumstances. He was not a skeptic, he was not stupidly indifferent, he was not a crafty opponent, but he was disposed to inquire after the truth. This was decidedly auspicious and hopeful. The first thing which the truth of God demands is, a mind open and attentive to receive it. The greatest censure which Scripture and observation compel us to pass upon multitudes of men is, that though the light shines, they will not receive it. The doors and the windows are barred closely against it. The mind has no interest in the truth; is profoundly insensible to its existence. A disposition to ask for the truth, to inquire for instruction, is the first sign of spiritual vitality. Inasmuch as the truth of God is nigh to us, flowing around us like the air, shining about us like the sun, the opening of the mind to receive it advances one immedi-

ately into the most auspicious proximity to its blessings.

This thoughtful teacher of the law was favored with the opportunity of a personal conversation with Christ. That is denied to us; but we possess what is better and greater. The kingdom of God has had a fuller disclosure since that day when the Son of man held these memorable conversations in Jerusalem. The redemption which is by Jesus Christ is amply revealed; and that revelation is given to us in a written form. Remote from all the benefits of the gospel are all they who feel not interest enough therein to consult the pages of inspiration with a candid and earnest spirit. Their faces are actually averted from the light; their backs are turned upon the kingdom of God.

The first step—and that step advances one farther than may be supposed—is, when he begins with personal interest to ask for the way of truth. That way is so plain and infallible, that to inquire for it is to find it. Show me the man who, roused out of apathy, is inquisitive after the way of the Lord; who is

earnest for the solution of those questions which have agitated his soul; who daily seeks for light and truth out of the oracles of God, even as he would have hung upon the lips of Christ in the days of his flesh; who is alert to improve every opportunity and help within his reach for acquiring that knowledge which is eternal life: and I will show you the very man who is not far from the kingdom of God. The only thing which separates one from the abundant blessings which are in Christ is, that opaque, inert condition of mind and heart which is likened unto death. To give heed, to inquire, to be candid, honest, earnest in seeking, at the words of Christ, what is needful for us to know, is to begin to live. Deepen this spirit of earnest inquisitiveness, and you bring one nearer and nearer to the kingdom of God. Eyes that are shut cannot see the light. Let them be opened, and we may hope for the spiritual discernment which brings salvation.

Indispensable as is this earnest action of the mind, it is only initiatory. That which shows a more decided advance towards the

kingdom of God is, a correct judgment as to the import of *the divine law*. The gospel of Jesus Christ is designed to be remedial of all those defects which are under the law. The consciousness of those defects must spring from a knowledge of the law itself. That which was the most hopeful of all things in the condition of this scribe was, that he had a true discernment of the spiritual nature of the divine commandment. In his judgment, holocausts, oblations, forms, rites were of no account compared with that supreme love which is the one essential law of our being. He who has reached this conviction will be likely to reach the conviction, also, that by that law of judgment he is impeached of a vast deficiency; and for this there is no remedy but in the grace of the Son of God. The law is the schoolmaster who leads us to Christ. Not far from the kingdom of heaven is he who beholds himself in the perfect law of his Maker; while the gospel will be an enigma and a stumbling-block to all such as discern not the spirituality of the divine statute.

To illustrate the many mistakes of men in

reference to this vital subject, the New Testament presents us with several tableaux of living personages. One resembles, as to the outward appearance, the scribe introduced into this narrative. He was a magistrate, in the prime of life, of great wealth, and altogether, as to position and character, one of the *élite* of the land.* He too displayed an unusual earnestness in his interview with our Lord. Seeing him approach, he ran, fell on his knees before him, saying, "Master, good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?" However mistaken and impertinent the answer which *we* may give to such a question, our Lord never misjudged the character of individuals. The question proposed by this ornate moralist gives us the first glimpse of his character. "What *good thing* shall *I do*, that I may inherit eternal life?" "If you are resolute in your determination," says Christ, "at *legal perfection*, the category of duty is briefly summed: Keep the

* *Vide* preceding chapter. The persons introduced on these several occasions, often confounded, are obviously distinct.

commandments." "What commandments?" was the quick and eager inquiry. "Those, of course, which compose the moral law: Thou shalt do no murder; thou shalt not commit adultery; thou shalt not steal; honor thy father and thy mother; all of which may be summed up in the one comprehensive requirement—Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." With the utmost promptness and decision, the young man replied: "Why, all these I have kept from my childhood. *What lack I yet?*"

Our Lord looked at him steadfastly, his calm eye reading that soul through and through; when, breaking the silence of that prolonged gaze, he said: "One thing thou lackest—if *thou wilt be perfect*—if thou wilt establish thy claim to a legal obedience which hath no flaw—go sell all thy possessions, give to the poor, and come take up thy cross and follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." No one who is not disposed to cavil at the letter can misunderstand the meaning of this direction. He would only display his own petulancy and folly who should complain

that this was an unreasonable demand made by Christ of all his disciples; and that this, indeed, was a hard saying, that every man must part with all his worldly estate before he can prove himself entitled to the kingdom of heaven. The passage contains no such sentiment, and the gospel presents no such condition. Here was a man who, by his own words, declared a wish and expectation to inherit eternal life on the *ground of perfect obedience.* Upon that ground, the ground which he had chosen, our Lord meets him; and for the purpose of convincing him that his legal obedience was fatally defective, he proposes a test which was explosive of his hopes. The truth was, that beneath all that fair and fascinating exterior there was a heart of idolatry. This man loved his money more than he loved his God. The finger of the Physician was laid upon the very tenderness and soreness of the disease. He had asked what *he did lack,* and the answer came with such a look and emphasis as convinced him that he lacked every thing. The bolt hit the conscience in the core. He went away grieved. Trusting in his own obedience,

he had asked how to inherit eternal life, and he had received a response which proved that no obedience of his had been commensurate with the holy law of God, which requires a love which is cordial, a love which is universal, a love which is supreme. The probe did its office; and this very man, who a few minutes before embraced the knees of Christ with fervid emotion, now turned away from Him with sadness, because the words which He had uttered proved to his own consciousness that he loved his riches more than he loved his God—more than he loved his fellow-man. It is *not* said of this man that he was near the kingdom of God. Whether he ever abandoned his ideas of legal perfection and accepted the grace of his Redeemer we know not; but this we know, that an honest admission of what the divine law is and what it requires is a prerequisite to salvation through the Son of God.

As if to make this one point clear beyond all doubt, a third person is introduced on a third occasion, and he also was a lawyer of the church. The cast of his mind differed

from those which we have considered already. He too inquired, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Christ answered him: "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" And he answering said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself." And He said unto him: "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live." But this inquirer, addicted to a literal and superficial construction, was willing to *justify* himself, and asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Then followed the parable of the good Samaritan, the full meaning of which is not understood, except we bear in mind the man and the circumstances which called it forth. It may seem to us like a beautiful painting, but it was like one of those pictures in the Interpreter's House, which gleamed terror on the soul of the Pilgrim, making him to tremble like an aspen-leaf. Both of these incidents had a common design—to convince the men here described that their obedience to the law of God was altogether defective, the one hav-

ing no love for his Maker, the other no love of the right quality for his fellow-man.

These interpretations of law are interpretations of ourselves; and no man is near to the kingdom of God, as that expression is used by Jesus Christ—salvation through redeeming grace, without merit of our own—whose self-complacency has never been dissipated by a right discernment of the law. The law never can save us; and he is the nearest to the forgiveness of the gospel who, with a contrite heart, discerns most clearly and feels most profoundly that perfection of the divine statute which impeaches and condemns us. The publican, standing afar off from the throng of worshippers, was already within the kingdom of God; while the conceited Pharisee, pressing up to the chief places of the temple-courts and foremost in his religious histrionism, was far removed from the grace of the Redeemer.

We intend something more than the analysis of a historic incident. The instance which is here recorded concerns every living soul. Would you compute aright your own rela-

tions to the kingdom of God, measuring your own proximity to those incomparable benefits in the gift of the Redeemer, answer to yourself whether there has been any change as to the interest you feel for the wise provision of your immortal spirit. The time was, it may be, when you were conscious of a most profound indifference to the love which passeth knowledge, and to the wrath to come. Is it so, that by influences which you can neither control nor describe, you have come to feel a want that has never been met, and to inquire for a good which never yet has been found? Does it seem as if a veil had been withdrawn from before your mind, so that in hours of deep and earnest thinking objects, which you never believed before, seem to start out from the shadows as if just created?

Have you begun to knock at those gates of wisdom where you never knocked before? Have you begun to pray for divine help in the solution of those spiritual mysteries which agitate you? Have you felt that your pride was melting down into a meek and gentle desire to know the way of the Lord more perfectly?

Are you a candid, diligent reader of the Scriptures? and do you ask that your soul may be illuminated, quickened, and inclined aright?

Have you been conscious of some new discernment of the divine law, admiring it as the expression, not of grievous severity, but of God's infinite benignity, clear as crystal and glorious as the firmament? and does there gleam across your mind, at times, the thought of what you are when judged by that perfect commandment?—times in which the truth will grapple with you as a mighty wrestler—that if you love any thing in the universe more than your Maker, then indeed you are an *idolater*, whether that object of preference be hideous as a hydra or fascinating as a syren? Are you ever startled by the thought of what the issue must be, if your self-assertion should never bow itself in happy submission to God, and your soul with such a purpose should be set free amid the powers of a changeless eternity? Does the conviction—sometimes clear and strong amid all your gains and profits—plough through your deepest consciousness, that you need out of yourself just that which

the Christ of God offers to give you—pardon, hope, peace, suretyship, salvation?

My dear friend, amid all these agitations, self-judgments, depressions, inquiries, gropings, if you did but know it, you are not far from the kingdom of God. You may be ready to judge yourself at a hopeless distance; but your condition is a thousand-fold more hopeful than it was before you awoke to this conscious sensibility. You feel that you are sick, and lo, the physician is at your bedside; the wound pains you, the balsam is nigh at hand. You have discovered that you are in want, and hard by is all the fulness of God.

It is a great thing to be *near* the kingdom of God, because it is such a great thing actually to be within it. All that is not within is without. It is not enough to be near salvation—*we must be saved*. I need not inform the intelligent reader that the condition described is peculiarly *critical*. In that immediate vicinity to the help which he needs, he stands balancing himself on the question, whether he will advance or retreat; whether he will press on

and cross the threshold, or turn back, and prove himself not fit for the kingdom of God.

To remember that once we were near the salvation of Christ, so near that our right hand might have touched and taken it, and after all that hand was withheld, this is a memory which will enhance remorse for ever. The recollection of former nearness to it will "bite like a serpent and sting like an adder." We can all recall seasons in our lives when, in a special sense, we were near to the salvation of God; affliction had mellowed us; truth had stolen into our hearts; we were inclined to an unusual sobriety; parental faithfulness melted us; but let us never forget, that to be almost persuaded to be a Christian is not the same as being a Christian; to walk around the city of God is not the same as to enter it; to discern our need, great as that is, is not precisely the same thing as to receive what that need requires. Our subject therefore pleads with all to press into the kingdom of God. Now, when you are so near to its security; now, when its gates stand open wide; now, when you can look in upon the brightness of the celestial

metropolis, and hear the gladness of its music; now, when invitations come forth from the Spirit and the Bride to take the water of life freely; now, when opportunities are so favorable, when the breath of prayer seems to waft you upwards; now, while God waits to be gracious; now, while He who calls himself your Redeemer, Saviour, Friend, Physician, Helper, is so nigh, avail yourself of his offices, and live for ever.

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

ZACCHEUS:

A True Convert.

LUKE 19:1–10.

V.

ZACCHEUS:

A True Convert.

In this passage we have the conversation of our Lord with a true convert, a penitent sinner. It presents a phase of character the very opposite of that demonstrated by the moralist, in the person of the young ruler. This might not appear to one whose eye merely glances over the record. Indeed, a superficial reader might receive a very different impression—even that this was a man inclined to boast of his own good deeds, a self-righteous act which it would be hard to reconcile with the blessing pronounced upon him by the Saviour. The evangelists make frequent use of ellipses in their narratives. They touch only the main points. They give the substance in outline, rather than in a finished picture. By collating all the several incidents, fre-

quently minute, we are sure to receive the right impression. Whatever is omitted is of small consequence ; that only is recorded which is essential to the subject-matter. This visit of Christ to Zaccheus, when we have compiled all the facts of the case, will impress us as an anti-Pharisaic demonstration, which resulted in conversion and salvation. By this time we must be convinced of the immense advantage of this method of inspired instruction through the medium of living persons—tableaux, as it were, of various characters in personal interviews with Christ—above all that could be conveyed by simple dogmatic assertion.

Few things can interest us more than the action of a mind in the very process of its religious conversion. Elsewhere we watch a soul through the struggles and conflicts and victories of its sanctification, and rejoice ourselves in the reflected joy of a ransomed spirit entering upon the security and blessedness of the heavenly city. Here is the beginning of that which is destined to reach such a consummation. We feel a profound concern to understand the very posture and act of the

man who, a sinner before, becomes a disciple of Christ, with the promise of such a magnificent futurity. Let us seek, then, to know the truth concerning this person, of whom Christ said at a particular time—a memorable epoch it was in that man's life—"This day is salvation come to this house."

It is not always possible to fix with accuracy the birthtime of religious purposes; yet when the process of change is defined and marked, it possesses a special interest for all thoughtful minds. We refer with utmost satisfaction to every act of Luther's mind at the epoch when light first broke upon him, during his monastic life at Erfurth. A memorable time is that when an earthly life begins; more important by far the time when, born again of the Spirit of God, we commence a career which for ever and ever advances us nearer to God himself. In depicting, accurately as we can, the condition of this mind on the occasion here described, we would not countenance the opinion that its action is a model pattern for every other mind in its conversion to God; for all

other persons may not be of the same habit and disposition with Zaccheus at the time when their conversion occurs. Nevertheless, every instance of conversion which the Holy Ghost has chosen to put on record is worthy of our study, and is, to say the least, the representative each of its own class.

The scene of the narrative is the city of Jericho, that ancient city, large and strong before the Israelites took possession of Canaan. Its distance from Jerusalem is not great, and thither our Lord was now going for the last time. As his public ministry is drawing to a close, every thing pertaining thereto attracts the greater attention and a concentrated interest. His miracles, his teachings, his theocratic claims had given him a widening fame, and as the end approached, his every movement excited public notice and discussion.

In the suburbs of Jericho there resided a man by the name of Zaccheus, of Jewish extraction, as the name indicates. He was a publican, an officer of the revenue; and as the place was quite notorious for the extent

of its trade in dates and balsam, by the management of the imposts he had found his position lucrative, and had become very rich. It is hardly necessary to remind the reader of the social condition and the general estimate of the class of men to which Zaccheus belonged. While the farmers of the revenue, of the first class, were Roman knights of considerable rank and dignity, their agents, the common collectors of tribute, were regarded by the Jews with the utmost contempt and odium. This was owing not only to the fact that the Jews thought it unlawful to pay tribute to a heathen power, but more especially to the fact that the publicans, having a certain share in the tribute which they collected, were generally noted for imposition, rapine, and extortion. The Jew who accepted the office of publican was execrated by his own countrymen. He was not allowed to enter the synagogues, and his presents for the temple were not accepted, being regarded as wicked and offensive. "Let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican," is only one of the many expressions in the New Testament which indi-

cate the general detestation in which all belonging to the order were held. It is nowhere affirmed that every man attached to the profession partook of the character usually associated with the order. Matthew, one of the apostles of Christ, and the first in order of the evangelists, was a publican at the port of Capernaum, or on the high road to Damascus, at the time when he was called to follow the Master. Neither is it affirmed that Zaccheus was particularly notorious for his dishonesty and exactions. Still he was not altogether clear of the imputations which belonged to his class. He was by no means immaculate, as his own confession betrays before this interview with Christ is closed. There were other things upon him besides the social ban which distinguished his profession. "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that *which was lost.*" These are the words which last fell from the lips of Christ—terminating the conversation, and explanatory of the whole transaction. Zaccheus, therefore, was one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He occupies the opposite pole to that where stood the

young ruler, in the halo of his spotless morality. Not only did he belong to another class socially, but in point of character also. The one was scrupulously honest and upright, defrauding not and stealing not; the other, we are forced to admit, by the purpose of restitution which he afterwards avowed, had defrauded, perhaps often. Instead of being classified with Pharisaic legalists, with ornate moralists, with scrupulous religionists, we must assign him a place in the general category of publicans and sinners; one who would have been found wanting, if weighed in the balances of common honesty. We shall lose the point of the whole conversation, if we mistake at the beginning the character of this man. We need not impute to him any thing extraordinary in the way of crime; but from these several expressions — the judgment of his neighbors— "He was gone to be guest with a man that is a *sinner;*" and his own admission, "Wherein I have taken any thing from any man by *false accusation;*" and Christ's final explanation, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which *was lost*"—we are forced to

conclude that this rich publican of Jericho was open to the charge of dishonesty and immorality.

But we are more interested in knowing what this man becomes, than what he was. Indeed, what he was is of no account, save as it indicates the greatness of the change which is here wrought, and the restoring power of that grace by which it is accomplished. We have described his character. What was the attitude of his mind at the very time when this interview with Christ commenced? We are not without materials for forming a judgment.

The person of Christ, as he passed through the city, was surrounded by a great crowd, composed chiefly of his avowed disciples and such as had been impressed by his miracles. If, as the narrative of Luke would lead us to believe, the miracle performed on blind Bartimeus was when Christ *entered* the city, all the people who saw it or who heard of it thronged around him, giving praise to God. To say the least, Zaccheus betrayed a great curiosity to see this extraordinary person of

whom he had heard so much. Small of stature, unable because of the crowd to see Jesus, he ran in advance, and climbed up on the boughs of a sycamore-tree which stood by the way along which Christ was about to pass. What ensues will not allow us to hold that the *only* motive he had was what we call an "*idle curiosity.*" He was something more than a stupid starer. Curiosity, however, is better than stolid indifference or supercilious contempt. "I will turn aside and see what this thing is"—when God kindles a burning bush, or creates a stir in human souls by the visit of his Spirit—is a purpose which indicates a more hopeful condition of mind than unthinking and unnoticing stupidity.

We are not at liberty to suppose that this was the first time that Zaccheus had heard of Christ. Bethany was not so far distant that he was not likely to catch the flying rumor concerning Lazarus and the miracle at his grave. Most of the mighty works of Christ were already finished; most of his public discourses had already been uttered—for this visit to Jericho was within a few days of his

crucifixion—and perhaps Zaccheus had heard of the parable of the publican and the Pharisee, or some other weighty saying of Christ had put his thoughts in motion, and excited an intense desire, on his own account, to see this most remarkable personage. However plausible such suppositions may be, we will not trench in the least upon mere hypothesis, but will confine ourselves rigidly to such evidence as is furnished in the few touches of the inspired pen. There certainly is great *earnestness* in the man; and what is more, no disposition to conceal it. He has none of that caution which the rationalist Nicodemus showed when coming by night to converse with Jesus. Whatever the motives which impel him, whatever the emotions which struggle in his soul, Zaccheus, the rich man of Jericho, is not ashamed to put himself, in broad daylight, in a most conspicuous place, before all the people, where concealment was impossible.

During his second general ministry in Galilee, our Lord was invited by a certain Pharisee to dine at his house. That Pharisee

thought that he was conferring a great honor upon Christ by this invitation; and though Christ accepted it for the purpose of administering the lessons which he did to the Pharisaic guests, yet he pronounced no blessing upon that house, for it was the abode of pride and arrogance. How different was the temper of Zaccheus. He did not presume to invite Christ to his house; but when Christ himself proposed to be his guest, Zaccheus shows by every expression that he regarded it as the greatest honor. He must have had a poor opinion of himself, which is the best definition of true humility. There was nothing like pride or arrogance or superciliousness about the man, but a most hearty sense of his own unworthiness; for the alacrity he displays in accepting the visit which Christ proposes is a proof that he considers it as an honor and a blessing. Nor do I see any thing to forbid the belief that his heart had often been touched by the sense of his misery and guilt, and that this may have been one among other reasons why he did not obtrude himself through the crowd with his own voluntary

invitations to the Son of man. One thing is certain, Jesus Christ never assorted with sinners from any affinity of tastes, but solely because his gospel proffers the only relief from guilt and misery; and He who "needeth not that any should testify of man, since he himself knew what was in man," saw in the heart of Zaccheus a disposition which was favorable to the reception of the gospel; and what this disposition is, we are most abundantly informed in other portions of the New Testament. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick;" and, "Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The pith of the entire narrative lies in this, that Christ went in as a guest with a *sinner*, in whom there was that very sense of conscious humiliation on account of sin, which fitted him to receive the grace, the life, the hope which the Son of God only could give.

As the Saviour approaches the place which Zaccheus had chosen, we observe an act upon His part which interests us most of all. It was by no accident that His eye was directed to the spot. Seeing Zaccheus, He might have passed

him without remark. But He is about to give a new illustration of his aim in coming into the world. He who, at the beginning of his ministry, had astonished Nathanael by a reference to his habits of retirement beneath a fig-tree, does not mistake the name or disposition of the man perched among the branches of the sycamore. The reading of men's thoughts by Christ, so many instances of which are recorded in his life, was not an act of mere sagacity, an inference from words and looks and manners, but an actual knowledge of what was passing in the heart, and so must ever serve as an encouragement to all who would still approach him for spiritual medication.

Here we should notice that conjunction of agencies and events which illustrates the manner in which Providence ministers to the Spirit in effecting the revolution of souls and destinies. Christ finds that for which he was seeking, the lost sinner; the sinner finds what he had sought to find, a condescending Saviour. This was the last time that Christ was to visit Jericho. If Zaccheus had not been alert now,

he would have failed of his only opportunity. That is always a memorable time in any man's history, when, through a book, a letter, a personal interview, a sermon, a special providence, he is brought into contact with that spiritual power which arrests his waywardness and changes the whole current of his being. This is a thought which should impart activity, and caution to an improvement of occasions, inasmuch as we have so many proofs that the Divine Spirit is not indisposed to meet our advances.

In the present instance, the advance is altogether on the part of the Redeemer. Calling to Zaccheus by name, He bids him descend without delay, for that He intended to abide at his house. The conspicuous position of the man gave great publicity to these words, as our Lord intended—he being about to demonstrate anew most forcibly the whole aim and scope of his mission. Nothing prevented Zaccheus—no diffidence, no sense of unworthiness, no shame—from responding instantly to the condescending words by which he felt himself to be so highly honored. He

hastens to come down, and received Christ most joyfully. And the people murmured when they saw that Christ had gone to be guest with a man that was a sinner.

What passed between our Lord and Zaccheus while the former was resting in the house of the latter we are not informed. The result, not the process, is given. That the interview was protracted for a considerable time seems to be implied in the very words employed by Christ when proposing the visit. Some high critical authorities affirm that Christ probably remained with Zaccheus through the night. Whether it was for an hour or several hours, or until the next day, it is certain that our Lord was domesticated for a considerable time with this publican of Jericho; that the time was not spent in silence; that when we next hear Zaccheus speak, it is in terms which indicate the greatest of changes. We cannot suppose that the words uttered by Zaccheus—"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold"—were the first words with which he

began the conversation; rather are they the determination with which it closes; the expression of a purpose which indicates and proves the reality of his repentance. Receive them as the words with which he first accosted Christ—as it were introducing himself—and they convey the idea of self-commendation; you cannot avoid the conclusion that they contain a touch of Phariseeism, and that Christ gave him a blessing because he was so charitable and so superlatively equitable. Surely this cannot be the meaning or aim of the conversation. Besides, if the words are understood to refer to a past habit of his life, a most singular person would he prove himself to have been, as claiming the benediction of Christ, mixing up his charitable gifts and his false accusations, his frauds and his restitutions, in one compound.

We must conclude that there was an interval of time here—an ellipsis extending as long as Christ abode with Zaccheus; and that what is reported here, from the lips of the publican, is the issue, the result of the interview, embodied in the form of a penitent purpose. He

comes into our view as a sinner; he passes out of our view as one who is changed and converted by the grace of Christ; a lost one, whom Christ had sought and saved; to whose house salvation that day had come, with a blessing from the Redeemer. What is quite an important item in the transaction is, this avowal of purpose on the part of Zaccheus was public; it was heard by others, as the eleventh verse informs us, and so it assumes the character of an open vow, demonstrative of an entire change in the character of the man.

"And Zaccheus *stood forth*." This was after we know not what words of confession and inquiry on his part, and instruction and promise on the part of Christ; but now Zaccheus stands forth before all the people, and makes declaration of this purpose, in proof of his repentance: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and whatever I have taken"—a more accurate translation is this, than the use of an "*if*," as implying a condition, an uncertainty, or a possibility—"whatever I have extorted from others by false charges or any maladministration of office, I

will restore it fourfold." A new man is this, a converted man, a Christianized publican; and in all these purposes which he avows there is an air of honesty, a whole-heartedness, which proves that the change is thorough and worthy to be recorded. "And Jesus said unto him, *This day* is salvation come to this house; forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham"—not only a lineal descendant, however much his Pharisaic neighbors might disown and discard him, but recovered and confirmed in a higher sense and by a better title—"for the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Assuming, as we must, that this language of Zaccheus, followed by such a benediction from Christ, is the expression of a penitential purpose, the fruit and evidence of the greatest of changes in his character, we linger for an instant upon the two things by which the sincerity of his repentance was demonstrated. Christian penitence is something more than a thought or an emotion or a tear; it is action: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor." This is not the boast of self-

commendation, but the purpose of a new life. Conversing with the moralist who prided himself on his perfection, our Lord, to convince him of his imperfection, even that his love did not reach the standard of the law, bade him sell all that he had and give to the poor. That direction was given as a means of conviction, and not as a ladder by which to climb to a higher morality. Here, in this picture of the publican—the pendant of the picture of the moralist—no such direction is given by our Lord; but there is a spontaneous expression of Christian feeling on the part of the true convert which proves the genuineness of the change wrought in his heart. Instead of a wish to enrich himself as before, at the expense of others, there is now the new emotion and purpose of charity. He does not make this avowal in the spirit of a self-righteous Pharisee; it is the free act of a grateful and penitent sinner; it is the evidence of a new affection. It is no act of a moralist, setting himself a task; it is the cheerful resolution of a man who has come to see how much he owes to that mercy by which he is forgiven and

saved; and who, in the expression of his novel Christian disposition, would evince his love for his fellow-men. The legalist confessed with sorrow that his love, even that of which he boasted, was not equal to the sacrifice of his idolized wealth; the penitent, converted publican, of his own accord, proposes to distribute largely of his goods to the poor, in proof of that new love to God and man which the grace of Christ has just enkindled. This is always the way in which the reality of Christian conversion evidences itself. It makes the selfish man charitable; the churlish, liberal; and implants in the soul which hitherto has cared only for the things belonging to himself, a disposition to seek also the things of others. The law of God requiring us to love our neighbor as ourselves is not repealed or modified; while we cannot look to it for hope, or for the proof of our perfection, strange would it be if, forgiven and saved as those that were lost, we should show no sign of a wish or a purpose to conform to that celestial statute.

The other proof of genuine conversion

evinced by Zaccheus was, in his purpose to make ample *restitution* unto those whom he had wronged. The Jewish law prescribed several things in regard to the restitution of property obtained fraudulently. In case of voluntary confession, without detection and without trial, the person implicated was required only to return what had been stolen, with the addition of one-fifth of its value. In case of judicial conviction, a much larger sum was enjoined. In all cases the implication was, that there could be no genuine repentance unaccompanied by restitution. To be sorry for having extorted property from another, and still retain that property in possession, would be more incongruous than for sweet water and bitter to flow from the same fountain. Zaccheus seems to throw his constitutional earnestness into the purpose of making restitution unto all whom he had wronged. There is nothing halfway in his resolution. Of his own accord, without any detection or trial or conviction or compulsion, he determines to restore fourfold — far, far beyond all which law ever prescribed; more

than principal, more than interest, largely in advance of all legal claims. He is determined to make thorough work of his penitence and his reform. Allowing that only a small fraction of his property had been acquired by dishonest means; if he gave half of all he possessed to the poor, and then restored fourfold upon all he had purloined, it is evident that very little was retained for himself, and that he was determined that his new Christian honesty should go to the very root of the matter.

Restitution is an indispensable part of true repentance. To right, so far as possible, those we have wronged, is essential to a genuine Christian conversion. That repentance which expresses itself merely in words and downcast looks and regrets and confessions and sighs and tears, while the wrong is not redressed, and the hand still clutches what belongs to another, is of that sort which deceives no one so much as the party himself. It may be that the person who has most of all suffered injury, either in property or reputation or wounded affections, is gone from the earth, beyond the reach of redress and confession

and penitential restitution. When this is so, the penitent has a lifelong sorrow which is very bitter and very hard to bear, because unrelieved by the forgiveness of those he has wronged. Often will he wish that the injured one might return to hear his confession, accept his reparation, and permit his honorable amends. When death has thus interposed between the injured and the injurer, the true penitent will certainly discover some act or some method of expressing the honesty and thoroughness of his sorrow. The charities which have been founded, the churches which have been reared, throughout the Old World, in memory of wrongs to be redressed, provided there is no confounding of penance and penitence, are monuments of a most Christian sentiment.

Upon this subject of restitution as an essential part and sign of repentance, it should be said that it relates not merely to what was purloined by downright stealing, by out-and-out vulgar fraud, but quite as much to acts of finesse and dexterity which may have even the color and pretext of law for their exculpation.

The original expression in the text is very significant: "If I have taken any thing by false accusation." All that is intended by these several words in English is expressed by one word in the Greek—ἐσυκοφάντησα—referring originally to the act of informing against those who were engaged in the contraband trade of figs. It is the etymon of our English word *sycophant*, shading gradually down from a fig-informer to a general tale-bearer, and then into the modern usage of flatterer, one who courts favor and carries his ends by crafty, yet genteel dissimulation; so that the true sense of the word used by Zaccheus in his penitent purpose covers a very large class of transactions not unknown to a commercial community; none so much as those which have been performed with a most smooth and oily blade, with an art and address and dexterity which elude the letter of the law and expose to no judicial indictment. May we not go far in advance of this, holding that many things are done in strictly legal processes, under cover of statutes designed to afford relief to the unfortunate, by which some

are "put through," as the phrase is, on terms which cannot be justified in the forum of the conscience, this inward and unbribed judge pronouncing a verdict against the retaining of that which honestly belongs to another? There are wrongs besides those which are perpetrated by coarse villany; there are plasters besides those which are made of flies and caustic. Hezekiah had a *lump of figs* laid upon the boil. Two days before he died, when in the very acme of his power and glory, Mohammed went for the last time into the mosque, and asked if he had injured any man; if he owed any man: a voice answered, "Yes, me three drachms," borrowed on such an occasion. Mohammed ordered them to be paid. "Better be in shame now," said he, "than at the day of judgment." "Let his own back bear the stripes." Mr. Carlyle quotes the incident as an act of heroism.* "Better," says the Son of God, "to enter into life with one eye, or one foot, or one hand, than having two eyes, and two feet, and two hands to be cast into hell-fire." Better to be poor, with

* Heroes, p. 90.

Christian and magnanimous repentance, than to be rich, with a self-reproving, stinging, restless conscience. Restitution—principal and interest, simple, compound, fourfold—springing from a Christian purpose secures a smooth pillow for life, in death, and a crown of honor for a head that shall be lifted up without shame in the kingdom of God. "This day is *salvation* come to this house," said Jesus Christ to the true penitent; "for the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Salvation is the key to the whole Christian revelation; and the way for us to obtain admittance to the kingdom of God is, by the acknowledgment of sin and the purpose of repentance. In unfolding and applying the gospel, there need be no charge or suspicion of crime and immorality. Nevertheless, we are all under the implication of guilt, for sin is the transgression of law; and the law by which character is judged in the sight of God is that which requires a constant, faultless, supreme, and perfect love. And Christ comes to bring us forgiveness and salvation and eternal life, on other and easier terms.

Better to have Christ for a visitor than any of the princes of the earth. One hour from him, in his gentle offices as a Saviour, is more than to stand for a lifetime before kings.

Ask not, as if suggestive of doubt, whether he would be willing to honor you with his presence. He waits not to be urged by your importunity, but proposes himself to visit you. The advance is altogether and always on his part. Before you can doubt this, you must tear out from the New Testament this narrative of the penitent publican, the parable of the lost sheep, and every invitation which gives significancy to the advent of the Son of Man. Before you can question, with any show of reason, this readiness on the part of Christ to visit and to save any and all, you should reconstruct the whole volume of Revelation; instead of the predictions which sparkle through the night of ages, heralding the coming of the Saviour, there should be nothing but gloomy and portentous menaces; instead of the Psalms, which carol out the gladness and praise which His advent awakens, there should be dirges moaning the laments of the lost and forsaken;

instead of the angelic hymn which welcomed His birth for the joy of the world, there should have been silence, and fear, and wondering, and concern, as at a dark mystery; instead of the promises, the invitations, the assurances from the lips of Christ, which lie all over the pages of the New Testament, for grace and sparkle and number like the drops of the morning dew, there should have been reserve and caution, as if the glorious gospel of the blessed God were designed only for some favored few, and hence every reason to suppose that you were not of the class; nay, you must suspend this preaching of the gospel to every creature, limit its phrases of welcome, and whisper out its doubtful and contingent terms; instead of shouting aloud and to all, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;" you must forget every thing you know as to the joy which there is in heaven for every sinner that repenteth; all you ever heard of the multitudes who, believing in Christ, have found peace, living under his smile and dying on his bosom, and who are now reclining on the banks of the river of the water of life,

and making the temple of God to resound with the songs of their ceaseless gratitude.

There is nothing sure in nature, nothing true in morals, nothing certain in revelation, if it be not this—that Jesus Christ is willing, is desirous to visit us, and visit all, with his great salvation. To each of us he says at this hour, "Make haste and come, for to-day I would abide at thy house." The question with us is, not whether we can persuade this Prince of all the earth to honor us with his presence, but whether we are willing to receive him as a guest, who asks that he may enter to sup with us.

"Morning, noon, and midnight watches,
List, thy bosom-door!
How it knocketh, knocketh, knocketh,
Knocketh evermore.

"Say not 'tis thy pulse's beating;
'T is thy heart of sin;
'T is thy Saviour knocks, and crieth,
'Rise and let me in.'"

No length of time is needed to mature your purposes when called to decide whether you will admit the best Friend you have in the universe. Imitate the alacrity of this Jewish

publican. Make haste and receive this divine Guest most joyfully. That very day Zaccheus avowed his penitent purpose; that very day salvation was pronounced on his house. You may not have anticipated such a blessing when you began to read this narrative; you may not have thought what changes and whose blessings were before you this day, any more than Zaccheus, when he went forth that morning into the streets of Jericho; but before the day was gone, the greatest of all events had occurred in his history; and it would have been absurd—nay, he would have lost the divine favor—if he had asked for weeks, or days, or even hours, for consideration whether he would receive the Saviour as a visitor!

I do not say it with any qualified sense, with any reserved meaning, but in the most literal and truthful meaning of the words; nay, I do not say it at all; it is Christ himself who says, what we only repeat, that "whosoever cometh unto him shall in no wise be cast out;" and that *to-day*, if you will hear his voice—to-day, if you will but receive him who has long waited to be gracious—to-day, if you will

go to your closet, and breathe out from a broken heart your confession of sin, and leave your vow of honest repentance, then to-day Christ will say, "Salvation is come to this house;" and this day you shall begin a new life, the life everlasting.

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

THE CENTURION OF CAPERNAUM:

The Modest Man of Faith.

MATT. 8:5-13.
LUKE 7:1-10.

VI.

THE CENTURION OF CAPERNAUM:

The Modest Man of Faith.

This interview between our Lord and the centurion of Capernaum will help us to understand the nature and power of that simple *trust* which is the distinctive element of the Christian life. I speak of this as a personal interview between Christ and the centurion. Following the record of Matthew, we should never imagine any thing besides the personal presence and request of the Roman captain. Turning to Luke, we receive the impression that the request was preferred, not in person, but through the elders of Capernaum, who had received great favors at his hand. Whether the conversation was conducted with the centurion in person, or through those whom he had requested to act in his name, is of no consequence whatever in reference to the main

teaching of the passage; this remains unaffected by either mode of statement. It is an old rule in law and in common life, that he who acts through and by another acts for himself. What forbids that, collating the narratives of the two evangelists, we should unite them both in the supposition that the centurion at first, in his great distress, sends his friends once and again to Christ, and afterwards comes himself?

But these are matters which pertain altogether to the letter. Christ is now returning to Capernaum from a tour of instruction throughout Galilee, which had been extended through the greater part of the summer. Taking his seat upon the declivity of a mountain near the town, he delivered to a great multitude that most impressive discourse which passes by the name of "The Sermon on the Mount," which presents to us Christianity in the form of "Judaism spiritualized and transfigured; and so is the transition from the law to the gospel."*

No sooner had Christ reached Capernaum

* Neander.

itself, than his aid was besought in behalf of a sufferer. It seems that there resided at this post a detachment of the Roman army, under command of a centurion. He was of course a Gentile. There is no proof that he was a proselyte to the Jewish religion. If he had been, the fact doubtless would have been mentioned by his Jewish friends and neighbors as a special claim upon the kindness of Christ. The faith which he exhibits appears the more extraordinary because of his heathen origin and education, being in contrast with that which might reasonably have been expected from "theocratic Israel." And this man, who appears to have been remarkably humane and liberal, had a servant to whom he was greatly attached, and who was now grievously ill—paralyzed as to power of motion, yet exceedingly sensitive to pain. Hearing that Christ had returned to Capernaum, the centurion sent to him with the utmost confidence that he should receive assistance and relief in this hour of extremity. What had led him to this confidence we do not know. Undoubtedly he had heard of the fame of Christ. Perhaps,

nothing more probable, he was the neighbor of that nobleman whose son, at the word of Christ, had been healed here at Capernaum. It will be remembered that, during our Lord's first general ministry in Galilee, when he was at Cana, a man belonging to the court of Herod Antipas came to him and begged him to go down to *Capernaum*, where his son was lying dangerously ill. Christ did not accompany this distressed father to the place, but he assured him that his son would recover. Repairing to his home in Capernaum, which he reached the next day, he was met by his servants on the road with the joyful news that, at the very hour of the preceding day when Christ had spoken the word, his sick boy was entirely restored. The seat of this miracle, accomplished by the Saviour when absent in person, was this very city of Capernaum, where the centurion now entreats the interposition of Christ in behalf of his servant. His generosity had secured him many friends in the place, and the principal men, the elders of the Jews, readily acceded to his request to represent the case to our Lord. His true modesty appears

at the beginning. He does not venture to approach Christ directly, but only through the mediation of others. So the elders came, and stating the extreme illness of this humble man, besought him to come down to the house and heal him. To add force to the plea, they bore testimony to the excellent character of the person in whose behalf they preferred the request. They assured Christ that this centurion was worthy of this favor. Though he was a Gentile, yet he was a worshipper of the true God, and had shown great love for the Jewish nation; indeed, he had carried his generosity so far as, out of his own means, to build them a synagogue for divine worship. And Jesus said, "I will come and heal him." So he turned to go to the house of the centurion with his attendants. Seeing him approach, the centurion sent out other friends, and presently went forth himself, saying to Christ, "Trouble not thyself to come farther; for I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof. Indeed, I did not presume to intrude upon you myself at all; neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee. All that I ask

is, that, without putting yourself to further inconvenience, you would speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. I know what is meant by power and authority. I am a soldier, having those who are under my command. My will is law to such. They are moved and governed by my word. I say to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. And I believe that you have as complete a power over the most desperate diseases as I have over my soldiers and servants; that the simple expression of your will is all-sufficient; and if, without going a step farther, or entering that dwelling which would only be too much honored by your condescension, you would here, even here in the road, issue your authoritative mandate, disease would flee away, and my poor servant would be well."

When Jesus heard this, he turned to *the people* who followed him, marvelling at the modesty, the humility, the faith of the man, and said to *them*, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel;

not even there, where I might have most reasonably expected it; among the descendants of the very man who won the august title, *Prince of God*, because of the wrestling power of his faith—the progeny of that illustrious ancestor, who was called throughout all the nations of the East "the father of the faithful"—among them all, never," said Christ, "have I found such simplicity and power of faith as in this modest and humble soldier from Rome."

The sequel of the narrative is familiar to all. The authoritative word from the lips of Christ was uttered, and without the necessity of touch or putting forth of the hand, the sick servant was instantly restored to health.

As this was probably the first heathen whose relation to the kingdom of Christ was thus infallibly announced by our Lord, the fitting occasion was presented for alluding to the greatest of changes which were afterwards to occur in reference to the Gentile world. "I say unto you," says Christ, "that *many* shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children

of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

For what use was this historic incident furnished with a place in the inspired annals? Precisely what is the lesson which it conveys? Something more, surely, than the compassionate regard felt by our Lord for the sick and suffering; something more than his power to befriend and help and restore. In the dispensation of his mercy and power there was a difference. His miraculous interpositions were not in behalf of all, without discrimination. We are expressly informed that in certain places, and in regard to certain persons, he could not do many wonderful works, because of their *unbelief;* while in other instances faith, instead of being summoned into existence by miracles, itself summons miracles which, without it, never would have been performed. Observe what it is which elicits the panegyric of Christ in regard to this man, whose portrait is here presented in such vivid colors. Our Lord does not praise this centurion for his amiable care of his servants, nor for his gen-

erosity to the Jews, nor for his public spirit, nor for his humility—a trait so unwonted in a Roman soldier. To none of these acts or qualities does Christ direct our attention, but simply and directly to his *faith*. This faith is eulogized as surpassing all that he had seen among the Jews. He directs attention to it as being *so great faith*. He is said himself to have marvelled at this faith, as being something so extraordinary, both in quality and quantity. It would seem that this pagan, uneducated in the Jewish notions of the Messiahship, had reached a point—which is set forth for our emulation—where he reposed in simple trust in the superhuman power of Jesus Christ.

Let us dwell on that *faith* which is here illustrated in the words and acts of the centurion, and embalmed in the eulogium of our Redeemer. Not a child, whose eye is familiar with the pages of the New Testament, who does not know how much is made of this one word, *faith*. It is sprinkled over the whole surface of Revelation. It lies imbedded in all duties and doctrines. We know how much is made to depend upon it: even our personal re-

lation to Jesus Christ in this life and in the life to come. It is a subject concerning which all would wish to have the simplest and clearest conceptions. There is reason to believe that many suffer themselves to be confused in regard to the promise and power of a principle on which such immense consequences are made to depend; while it is certain that in practice none reach the full measure of their privilege in regard to Christian faith.

The thing which first arrests our notice in this recorded and panegyrized instance of faith is, its extreme simplicity. It is faith, and nothing but faith. It is denuded of all adjuncts and accretions. There is here no analysis of faith, and no definition of it. It seems to be assumed by Christ and his evangelists that all would understand what faith *is*. *The thing is enacted, not described.* Nothing is said of its pedigree, how it is produced, from what it springs. To dissect living flesh, and to scrape the bones with a scalpel, is no way to promote health. Faith is not engendered by scholastic definitions of its nature. Our libraries are full of theological disquisitions upon the subject,

and yet in general practice something appears to be wanting. That which is illustrated in this incident, and which we all have need to practise, is a *simple trust in a personal Redeemer*. If we can by any means increase this temper of the soul, or hope to say any thing which will tend to foster in any one more of this habit of mind which was so emphatically eulogized by our Redeemer, we shall be sure of success in the way which leadeth to everlasting life.

The word which we have chosen is, *trust*. Its synonym, *faith*, is so often used as a theological term, that some have come to regard it as denoting what is arbitrary or incomprehensible—outside the circle of human experience. What we are most concerned about is, the *thing*, not the *word*. The rind is of no consequence; we would get at that disposition of the heart in this centurion which won the kind words and offices of Christ.

This is something more than *belief*. Belief is the more generic word, which includes the specific act of trust. Belief does not always imply trust, though trust implies the prece-

ding act of belief. Belief is the act of the understanding; trust is an act of the heart. The latter carries with it the whole man. It has come to pass that too many in religious circles occupy themselves exclusively with the former, the act of the intellect; and so we have any amount of discussions and controversies and theses concerning articles of belief, rather than the practice of trust in what is already known to be true, which is of the largest promise for our present and future wellbeing. It cannot be forgotten that our Lord, on one occasion, gave thanks to his heavenly Father because that which was hidden from the wise and the prudent was revealed unto babes. Had what we call *faith* been a work of the intellect, that work by which we sift evidence and weigh proof and accumulate knowledge, how would it be possible that the wise and the prudent should not have the advantage over those of inferior culture and capacity? In all matters of science, the intellectual have the precedency. Newton and Locke and Leibnitz and Boyle surely had a discernment of astronomy and of the structure of the human

mind which no uneducated and ignorant rustic could attain. But this was not the quality which gives eminence in the kingdom of God. It is a fact implied in the words of Christ, and confirmed by thousands of instances, that men of the highest intellectual culture, the wise and the prudent, proficients in earthly sciences, are oftentimes wanting—as they themselves confess sometimes most plaintively—in all trustful repose of the heart. They philosophize about religion; they are very learned in the dialectics of theology; they have sharpened their intellects to the utmost keenness by all manner of reasoning processes; but they are still restless at heart, tossed to and fro, without any satisfaction. While others, who deserve, according to any scale of intellectual measurement, to be classed as "babes," take Christ into their hearts with unquestioning trust, acknowledging him and loving him with a most honest affection. That which assimilates all classes—the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant—is not knowledge; for this creates dissimilarity, and so causes contrasts and divisions; but that affection of

trust which is an act of the heart, with no distinction whatever. What could be the meaning of the apostle when addressing Greeks, who delighted in philosophic discussion, he abjured the *wisdom of words*, lest he should make of none effect what was the chief end of his ministry? If his purpose was to convince the understanding merely, why was not the wisdom of words the means, the only means, fitted to accomplish it? Surely that Spirit which challenges us to grow in knowledge as well as grace does not involve us in inconsistency nor entangle us with enigmas; but this is true, that with the *heart* man believeth unto righteousness; that *trust* is more than belief; that confiding is more than knowing; and that they who take the "Phantom of Sense" or the light of the understanding for their guide and law, will find, to their incurable sorrow, that they are working against their own peace, and accumulating difficulties in the way of that trusting affection and habit of the soul which alone gives repose.

How often are we, in our full-grown strength and pride, sent to little children for

the highest of all lessons. Childhood lies in trust, as a bird in its nest. He who loses early in life this habit of *trust* in parental superiority parts with the secret of happiness, and sets forth in a career which carries him farther and farther from peace, making it harder and harder to exercise true faith in his God and Redeemer. He is pronounced the highest in the kingdom of God who is most like a little child. He is a truly great man, the greatest of his species, who, after all his studies and attainments, after all the experiments which have put Nature into the crucible, forcing her to answer with explosive sparks; after pushing his understanding to its utmost vigor, comes back, in the temper of his heart, to the point where stood this centurion in his modesty and humility and undoubting *trust.*

We are authorized to hold up this example of perfect confidence in the power of Christ as a thing to be imitated. Should we inquire of each individual for information as to the causes which operate to keep him from a full religious satisfaction, we should be told of a legion

of doubts and objections which have assailed the understanding. Some would confess that they are not yet satisfied as to the complex nature of Jesus Christ. There are so many mysteries pertaining to his being, that they are baffled and perplexed. There are many things in the Scriptures which are hard to understand, and they find themselves addicted to the habit of revolving them, endeavoring to harmonize and comprehend them. These difficulties all belong to the sphere of the intellect. Let us propose a method which is curative of these perplexities. You have need to practise—I say to *practise*—more of trust; not a trust which is eyeless, groping about in the dark void, but a trust in this very Being—the Lord Jesus Christ. Surely you know enough, you believe enough concerning him to warrant your confidence in him as your Friend and Helper and Saviour. Just how much this centurion knew concerning Jesus of Nazareth, what judgments he had formed of his nature and prerogatives, we do not know; but he had seen and heard and known enough to justify that entire confidence which he exemplified.

Surely this is true of every one who reads these lines. You believe enough concerning the Lord Jesus Christ to make it right for you to repose in him the utmost confidence. In your hands is the Book which informs you of his names, offices, purposes, intentions, and promises. You are assured that he has all power both in heaven and on earth; and he has bidden you to come to him, to look to him, that you may be saved. We will not now utter another word concerning his claims and character, but ask you whether, with the amount of knowledge, belief, and conviction which you now have as to this one Being, this unique Person, this living Redeemer, you could do a wiser or more rational thing than to exercise that very trust in him which was once exhibited by this soldier of Capernaum? I say, *exercise* it—not merely admit that it is reasonable; not merely that you should define it and comprehend it, but that you should practise it, with the conviction that the *more* it is practised the stronger it will grow, and the happier you will be. We propose this to you just as you are, amid the cares, and mysteries, and

sorrows, and sins of life, and the anticipations of your approaching death. Is there a better thing which you can do than to try—not in the way of skeptical experiment, but with a most honest practice—what virtue there is in a simple trust in Him whose authoritative word can give life and health to the palsy of the soul? What effect would probably be produced if, dropping all the questions of the schools, and letting go your hold of all confidences of the flesh, you should *act* awhile on the principle of a simple, filial *trust* in this personal Saviour? You have been taught to acknowledge him; you know that he lives: now put away your pride, your intellectual inquests; and beseech him that, though you are unworthy that he should come under your roof, he would speak the word which shall send health to your soul; addressing him awhile in the spirit of those who pressed through crowds to touch the hem of his garment, or who importuned him in their blindness to put his finger upon their sightless eyes. Men do in regard to Christ almost every thing in the range of possibility: philosophize about

him, study about him, reason about him, every thing save trusting in him. Trusting, I mean, after the simple method which impelled this centurion to implore his help. Trust is not an inert passivity. It is at once the most active and the most quiet of all qualities. "The just shall *live* by faith." We are initiated into the best form of life through modest trust in Christ.

Let this subject meet you just as you are. Perhaps you are in trouble; clouds dense and dark have rolled over you; you are strangely depressed by outward afflictions and by inward fears; life has suddenly changed with you, and you are afraid as you enter into the cloud. What will you do? Will you set your understanding to the task of explaining these events to your perfect satisfaction, so that you will be submissive to them because of your ability to harmonize means with ends? Can you comprehend why a child was taken from your arms by death, or why an estate was lost after all your honesty and industry? Do you occupy such a high position in the universe that you can see how apparent inconsistencies and

contradictions result in a happy issue? Never. Your consolation is not through your understanding, but your trust. It is all mystery, it is all gloom; but one thing you know—you are in the hands of One who reveals himself under the endearing name of Saviour, and you must *trust*. It is all that you *can* do. You must not proudly push away the hand which would support your infant steps; you must take it, and confide in its strength, when you cannot utter a word.

"Therefore, whatsoe'er betideth,
Night or day,
Know his love for thee provideth
Good alway.
Crown of sorrow gladly take;
Grateful wear it for His sake,
Sweetly bending to his will,
Lying still.

"To his own thy Saviour giveth
Daily strength;
To each troubled soul that liveth,
Peace at length.
Weakest lambs have largest share
Of this tender Shepherd's care.
Ask him not, then, 'When?' or 'How?'
Only bow."

Then this great mystery of sin. Its entrance into the world. Its permitted invasion and hereditary descent. How many theories which have attempted its explanation. What a task is assumed if you are to adjust all the facts pertaining thereto to the satisfaction of your understanding.

Then the atonement made for sin through the death of the Redeemer. Men have separated themselves into different schools by the modes in which they have philosophized about the atonement; but the essence of the thing is this: "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Men of all schools and theories—men of learning and men unlearned—at last must meet in this, whether they can explain the mode or not; trusting in the power of Him who taketh away the sin of the world. Committing—it is the last and completest act of trust—our own soul, pierced, wounded, bleeding with the sense of its sins, unto Him who is able to save even to the uttermost. Is your own heart palsied with sin? betake yourself, with unfaltering trust, to this Redeemer—humility always goes with trust—and say,

"I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof; but speak the word only—say as of old, 'Be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven'"—continue in this trust—and thou shalt be saved.

Then there is before us another mystery, greater still, and one which cannot be evaded—the necessity of dying. Let me suppose that it is nigh at hand. To-day you are in health; to-morrow you are in your sick-chamber. The curtains are drawn which separate you from the world. One tie after another is detached, and you cannot avoid the belief that your last sickness has come, and you are about to go into eternity. What can you do? Must you summon Reason to your side, to propound some theory about dissolution and the physiology of a future life, and bid your Understanding to hold the light and play the guide while your eyes are growing dim, and your feet are stumbling on the dark mountains of death? Nothing—nothing of the sort. You can only look to Jesus Christ, and *trust*. Helpless, dissolving, alone, you can do nothing but look to Him who died once and rose again,

and in the language of simple trust, and nothing but trust, say to him, "Lord Jesus, into thy hands I commend my spirit." There is nothing more instructive or more touching than to see the men who, by learning and genius, have taken a place among the great ones of the earth, when coming to die, putting aside all in which once they gloried, and, like little children falling to sleep in the dark, ending life in simplest trust. In the philosophical revolutions of Europe, no man has acted a more conspicuous part than *Henry Jacobi*. A man of high sensibilities, and an anxious and persevering inquirer after truth, he labored under the common difficulty of philosophical inquirers: he sought it with a telescope, in the boundless space of the universe, instead of finding it nigh unto him, in his mouth and in his heart. At one time he writes thus to a friend: "There is a singular religious commotion throughout Europe, especially in Germany. I hear much respecting it from travellers who visit me. There must be something higher and nobler, and capable of being apprehended and possessed by men, or it

is not worth while that a theologian or philosopher should open his mouth and talk. I hear inquiries made on every side after this something, but I cannot find it. I am swimming between two oceans of heterogeneous elements. They will not unite to support me in common. As the one raises me up, so the other carries me down again into the deep." As his dying hour approached, when the lecture-room and books and speculation were all parted with, Jacobi prayed like a little child, and found what he never could find from travellers, from philosophy, in Christian trust; and he died with thanks upon his lips that at last he was permitted to pray, and enabled to pray with simple confidence in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

In September, 1860, the writer was walking, morning and evening, beneath the magnificent trees of the university of Bonn, on the banks of the Rhine. The leaves were beginning to fade and to fall; and hard by, Mr. Bunsen, who had long occupied the highest positions in the diplomacy of Europe, and at

* The Spirit of the Pilgrims, 1830, p. 64.

the same time in literary and theological labors, was slowly declining to the grave, and a few days after was borne by his sons to his burial. In his last waning days of life he said: "In spite of all my failings and imperfections, I have desired, I have sought, what is noble here below. But my richest experience is in having known Jesus Christ. How good it is to contemplate life from this elevation. This is the kingdom of God. Oh, my God, how beautiful are thy tabernacles!" As his attention was directed to a beautiful sunset, "Yes," said he in English, "that is beautiful; the love of God in every thing." "May God bless you," he added in French. "Let us depart in Jesus Christ." Afterwards in Latin: "Christus recognoscitur victor; Christus est, est Christus victor." And then in German: "Christ must become all in all." "I desire nothing theatrical; but I wish to say a few words in the midst of my children and friends. I am going to die, and I long to die. I offer my blessing, the blessing of an old man, to any one that desires it. To belong to a church or a denomination is nothing. I see

clearly that we are all sinners. We are safe only as we are in Jesus Christ. All the rest is nothing—nothing." So life ebbed away in a loving, peaceful trust.

This is the whole. The life which we now live is by faith in the Son of God. What the centurion had not, we have: the positive assurance and promise of the Redeemer. This has been verified by ages of human experience. Every man who has died in peace, looking unto Jesus, is an irrefutable argument for the wisdom of faith. We know enough, we believe enough concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, to warrant our implicit confidence. Let not the faith of a heathen soldier put us to shame. While others come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, to share in the blessedness of the kingdom, let not the children of the kingdom be excluded by their unbelief. The simpler our trust in Christ for all things, the surer is our peace. There is a firm substance for the hand to grasp. Lay hold upon it, and turn your eye to Jesus Christ, and find repose by the confession of your confidence in him.

"Trust his saving love and power;
Trust him every day and hour;
Trust him as the only light
In the darkest hour of night.
Trust in sickness, trust in health,
Trust in poverty and wealth;
Trust in joy, and trust in grief;
Trust his promise for relief.
Trust his blood to cleanse your soul;
Trust his grace to make you whole.
Trust him living, dying too;
Trust him all your journey through;
Trust him till your feet shall be
Planted on the crystal sea."

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

MARTHA OF BETHANY:

THE MOURNER.

JOHN 11:17-27.

VII.

MARTHA:

The Mourner.

Here have we the conversation of Jesus Christ with a *mourner*. Elsewhere we have his wise words with the rationalist, the skeptic, the formalist, the sensualist, the thoughtful inquirer; but here is the record of what he said to one whom death had bereaved, and who was yet in all the freshness of her inconsolable sorrow.

What a memorable time is that when death invades a family and fells his first victim. "In the year that King Uzziah died"—so is it that Isaiah begins one of his prophetic records. He dates from an epoch that was sure to be remembered. There is no anniversary in our domestic annals which is more certain to be borne in mind than that which marks the doings of death. "It is so many

years since father died." "It was in the very year that mother died." "It was so many days, or weeks, or months since husband, wife, brother, sister, child was buried." These are the common measurements of time in household chronicles, which remind us what an important event in our personal history is the death of a friend.

Four days had elapsed since Lazarus was laid in the grave. How slowly, how heavily those days had passed. The first day after the death of a friend, how it drags itself along, giving the mourner ample time to drain the cup of bitterness to the dregs. The first waking of the first morning after we were left alone; the vague sense of a great evil; the heavy weight at the heart before one is fully roused to consciousness; and then the unmitigated feeling of the whole truth, when one is completely awake—who that ever has experienced all this will ever forget it? The funeral of Lazarus was all over. Is there ever a time when the sense of desolation caused by death rolls over one so like a flood as when returning from the grave to a lonely home? It is a

most kindly arrangement on the part of Divine Providence for our benefit, that even then the necessities of duty will not suffer us to lie prostrate in self-abandonment, but lay their demands upon us for the occupancy of our thoughts and our hands. The poor—or rather, those who are under the necessity of personal employment and exertion—have in this regard the advantage over those with whom leisure is only the ampler opportunity for sorrow. So long as the remains of a friend are uninterred, we feel that we still retain a hold upon them. Then is it that one is much occupied with the necessary arrangements preliminary to the final disposition of the body; and then there is the stunning and bewildering effect of a novel experience, and the grateful sense of real sympathy on the part of friends who come around us as they never came before. But when the funeral-day has passed, and the first wild bursts of grief have given place to a more gentle sorrow—now is the time above all others most propitious for religious consolation. The time which Jesus chose for his interview with Martha and Mary, setting aside its rela-

tion to the miracle he was to perform, was far better for their religious instruction than the first or second hour after their bereavement.

Many were the friends of these bereaved sisters, as we are informed, who filled their house, to comfort them concerning their brother. In regard to mourners, we should carefully avoid the two extremes of neglect and inordinate intrusion. Now is the time for true and cordial sympathy. It is one of the advantages of sorrow, that it brings to the surface all the kindly sentiments, and none other, of our friends and acquaintances. Many have expressed surprise, when passing through a great affliction, at the number of real friends who appear to have been called into life by the event, and the expressions of genuine sympathy which have fallen from their lips. The custom of publishing in the daily newspapers the names of those who die, not to speak of it as a salutary *memento mori*, is of great advantage, by infusing a most gentle element into social intercourse. Survivors, who go into the street with the dress of mourners, have often expressed surprise at the many

tokens of tender and respectful regard which they have received. Persons with whom they were only partially acquainted, have seemed to take special pains to recognize them with some most affectionate salutation. Even when acquaintanceship was not intimate, it was not felt to be rudeness if the hand was extended with a most significant pressure. This is all as it should be. Sorrow widens the circle of sympathy, and you take into your hearts, through the fellowship of suffering, very many you would not have presumed to know in the common experience of joyous prosperity. If it be not the only, it is certainly the chief argument for the common custom of wearing mourning for the dead, that it shields those who wear it from unconscious and unintended improprieties, insuring in their behalf all those nameless acts of Christian consideration which spring from the rule of our faith, to "weep with those who weep." Should there be any whom you neglect, let it not be those who mourn. If so be that your sympathy is sincere, you may even presume a little beyond the claims and freedom of personal intimacy,

and by a visit, an inquiry, a message, a note—a speechless, but most expressive salutation—make some proof of your feeling towards those who have just entered the great brotherhood of mourners.

On the other hand, avoid in the house of mourning every thing approaching to impertinent formalism. The sick and dying are often disturbed by the intrusive inquisitiveness of visitors and the uncontrolled emotion of friends. So with mourners, nothing can be more annoying than visits of form, and the coming of many merely because they must. "As vinegar upon nitre," so are words which are cold, superficial, and heartless to those who are heavy at heart. Better to sit down by the side of a mourner and open not your mouth, than to say any thing which is not appropriate and laden with gentle love.

When we read that "many Jews came to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother," we are reminded of the various expedients which are employed by men to comfort those who mourn. There are some people, excellent in their way, who are alto-

gether unfitted for the office of consolation, because inexperienced in sorrow themselves. Through no defect of their own, they are wanting in complete sympathy; for sympathy means fellow-feeling, and implies equality of experience; but they never knew what it was to be bereft of an intimate friend. They utter good things. They intend well, but express themselves only in general platitudes and inappropriate commonplace. As well speak to the wind as to real sorrow, unless you begin your consolation with a most genuine condolence. There is no likelihood that one will succeed as a consoler who appears to begin his office by the vain endeavor to lessen the sense of loss. You cannot, you ought not convince a mourner that he has no occasion to mourn. To forbid grief is only putting a dam across a stream, throwing the water back and deepening its volume. You must suffer it to flow, and then infuse into it an apt and consoling quality. Christ himself, as the great Consoler of our race, was made perfect for the office through personal suffering; and it was with weeping that he approached the grave

where he wrought his most wonderful miracle and uttered his most sublime teachings.

As for those who prescribe *diversion* of mind as the cure for the wounds made by death, they only prove themselves sciolists in the treatment of sorrow. "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, so is he who singeth songs to a heavy heart." By nothing is the mind more distressed than incongruity and opposition of elements. The wounded spirit courts whatever is congenial, never what is antagonistic, creating effervescence by the meeting of contrary qualities. There is a time when it is wise to suggest to a mourner to go forth into the light and warmth and air of heaven, and avail himself, for the health of body and mind, of all which God has spared for our happiness. But even this transition must be gentle, and not violent; and the change must be accomplished so quietly, that one is aware of it only by the sense of refreshment. But as for forcible diversion, for words and scenes and acts which would compel a smile, it is an empiricism which aggravates symptoms and exasperates the hurt.

As for those who intrude into the presence of mourners with stoical counsel, couched in such expressions as these—"We must bear what we cannot help;" "We must expect our turn with the rest;" "It is better to be brave and manly than to give way to grief"—we despatch them all with the words of Job, in reply to advisers of the like quality: "I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are ye all. Shall vain words have no end? I also could speak as ye do, if your soul were in my soul's stead. I could heap up words against you. Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged; though I forbear, what am I eased?"

Perhaps these prefatory remarks concerning the condition of those whom death has bereaved, and the several expedients resorted to by mistaken friendship, will help us the better to understand the conversation which ensues between a true mourner and our divine Lord. It is a great art to know *when*, and *how*, and *what* to speak to such as mourn; and blessed are they who go forth in the time of sorrow to meet and converse with Christ.

The time had come in the cottage of Laz-

arus and his sisters when they were in sore need of sympathy and friendship. There is no time when our wilted strength confesses its need of friendly help so much as when extreme illness has come, with all its fearful apprehensions and forecasting shadows. How Martha and Mary longed that Jesus should come unto them when Lazarus was sick! They sent one to find him, and to ask him that he would hasten to Bethany. Not understanding the reasons of his delay, they looked for him as one looks for a physician in whose skill he has implicit faith. Time hastened by, and Lazarus died and was buried. Three days after, Martha heard that Jesus was coming, and she hastened to meet him. The first words were uttered by the mourner herself. Generally, it is well that it should be so. Our Lord uses no superfluous words; never those which are inappropriate. Let the heart that is stricken make utterance of itself; then will you know how to adapt your own speech. "Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, *if* thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." That Mary, who at this time appears not to have been in-

formed of the arrival of the Master, should, when she heard of it, address him in precisely the same words, shows how much they had talked together on the same subject ever since their brother had died. In this they were like all mourners, who are apt to indulge in vain regrets, upbraiding either themselves or others, and imagining if this or that had been otherwise, death might have been averted. With good reason did these mourners cherish regret for the absence of Christ, for they had seen his miracles, and were heartily convinced of his power to rebuke disease and heal all manner of sicknesses; and well did they reason that, if he had been present, he would not have suffered his own friend to die. There is no reproach, as some have thought, in these words. Martha does not upbraid him for his delay; she speaks no word of reprimand; she asks for no explanation; and if the expression of regret for his absence seems to imply any thing but her most hearty faith in the power of Christ, that all disappears at once when she subjoins in explicit terms, "But I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God,

God will give it thee." That at this time she had any determinate notion that Christ would raise her brother from the dead does not appear; rather the contrary; for when, later in the day, they went to the grave, and Christ commanded the stone at its mouth to be removed, Martha reluctated that there should be an exposure of the face and form, on which "decay's effacing fingers" had already begun their loathsome work; nor does she appear to think of the possibility that her brother should be brought back to life. So far as we can interpret the state of her mind at the beginning of the interview, it was one of unfaltering faith in Jesus, making utterance of itself in words which are vague, as if she hardly knew herself what she was saying. Her mind is so full of faith in this great Friend, that death itself could not shake it—as evinced in the words, "*even now;*" but as to what she was to expect would be done—if there were undefined hopes and fleeting presentiments, these were counterbalanced by misgivings; so that her mind was in a condition hard to be explained to itself, beyond this, that it held to an unshaken

confidence in our Lord. That confidence was to be advanced to its highest quantity: "And Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again;" the first words that he uttered on this occasion. Fit are they, as we now interpret them, to be carved on the face of every gravestone. But what did they import as used on this occasion? It is not necessary to limit their meaning to the act of resuscitation which our Lord was about to accomplish; they are simply future, declarative of that which was designed to develop and strengthen yet more that faith which had already been confessed. How Martha understood the words, appears from her response: "She saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." What varieties of thought and feeling are expressed in these few words. Christ had said, "Thy brother shall rise again." *Rise again!* the assurance is unqualified and strong, and therefore she connects it, of course, with the final consummation, with the last day. But there is an air of despondency even in this admission. That day is too remote. Long before it should come, the weary mourner

would herself be laid by the side of her departed brother. She had hoped for something, she knew not what, more consolatory, because more immediate. She could not find in that promise of an ultimate resurrection all the comfort which her heart then craved; so she said, "Yes, *I know* that he shall rise then," as if she were but imperfectly satisfied with the admission of this general announcement. The wounded spirit of every mourner needs an immediate consolation; something nearer and warmer and more real than can be drawn from an event to occur we know not how many centuries from this. This our Lord proceeds now to give. The words which follow are the gist of the whole conversation; nay, of the whole narrative; for the miracle which was afterwards wrought was only designed to give confirmation of the central truth which is here uttered. Had our Lord at this point distinctly informed Martha what he was about to do on that very day, in her wild and tumultuous joy, she might not have paused to reflect that, after all, this would be only a temporary relief and respite. The destroyer, compelled to release

his victim now, after a season would return, and the scene of sickness and death through which they had just passed would be reënacted at some other time. Were divine power to meet us at every grave which we visit on our way to our own, and restore our dead friends to life, this would be felt to be true, (and so far diminishing all the joy which their return would occasion,) that they are mortal still, and both they and we must ere long be subject to the grim foe which has been so unrelenting, and will be so to the last. Now it was to meet this state of things, by a few words which should stand for ever the grand consolation for all mourners to the end of the world, that our Lord, when he next speaks, addresses himself—assuring this sister, bereaved of her brother, that he and she were now, and always should be united one to the other in a form of life which was absolutely imperishable. "I know," said Martha, "that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth,

and believeth in me, shall never die." Something very different from a belief in a remote resurrection is here. Something which is present and immediate. Something which was embodied in his own living form. Have you marked the transition? So gently, so skilfully, yet so naturally in easy consequence upon what had been said before, that a superficial eye might not notice it. The transition of thought is from the dead Lazarus to the living Saviour; just that which we should always endeavor to make when administering solace to the bereaved—from the departed friend to the Friend who never dies, and in whom those who have died and those who still live to mourn may have a life which death itself can never touch or wound. The absolute form in which the announcement is made, "I am *the resurrection* and *the life*," proves that far more is intended by the expression than the mere promise that he would so exert his power as to cause those who are dead to rise again; for, indeed, we can see in the language no promise of the resurrection of the body, save as that is included as a part or as a con-

sequence of a larger truth: that Christ himself is in such a sense the life of men, that all who believe in him shall share in that life which is superior to all changes of the body—an element of imperishable and endless joy. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, his body entombed, still lives, and shall live for ever; for there is another life than that of the body. And whoever there be who is now alive on the earth, and believeth in me, shall never die." What! shall he never meet the gloomy necessity of death and decay? Does Christ exempt any from the universal condition of mortality? None at all. Something better than this is here revealed; and the skilful manner in which it is affirmed should not escape our grateful notice; for nothing could be more emphatic in all the evolutions of human speech. There is no mention made at all, in the concluding clause, of the death of the body—as though it were not worthy of consideration. It is an incident not to be taken into the account. It is an inferior fact, which does not interfere with the grander truth which is here so sublimely announced. There is only

one allusion in the two verses to the death of the body, and that is in the first. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead." He refers, of course, to the death of the body. Beyond this, there is no more allusion to this kind of death, that being treated as an inconsiderable and unimportant incident; a thing not to be mentioned or regarded at all in comparison with that immeasurable evil which alone deserves the name of death; out of which every one that believeth is sure to be delivered. Christ is speaking to a mourner—one who was lamenting a dead brother; and his words are these: "Faith in me is the source of true life, now and for ever. They who have it, whether their bodies are in the grave or living upon the earth, have life, a life that never dies;" so that the death of the body is overlooked and disregarded and unmentioned, as something which is comparatively of small consequence; the only death which is to be deplored and dreaded is that out of which we are sure to be delivered by believing in the Son of God. Vastly more emphatic is this form of teaching than it would have been if

our Lord had dwelt in many words upon the death of the body, which was the thing then uppermost in the thoughts of the weeping Martha. He lifts the mourner at once to a region of thought so lofty that the dying or the living of the body is to be treated as a thing indifferent, of momentary consequence: the main thing being this, that the true consciousness of the Christian believer lives; it lives now; it will live for ever; for it is united by faith to Him who is abstractly and absolutely THE LIFE. Just before, Martha had confessed her belief that her brother would rise again in the resurrection at the last day—and that was a great thing to believe, in comparison with the blank and dreary creed of paganism; but when our Lord asserted what I have now explained, which was something far in advance of her first confession, he turned to her and said: "*Believest thou this?*" And she said: "Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." How much this admission implied in her case we need not pause to discuss. Even if she did not rise to the full

comprehension of those spiritual truths which Christ had just uttered, her faith in Christ was vindicated and confirmed; and this was before she saw her brother come forth from the tomb. But greater things than these have been said and done since by our Lord himself; so that those words which were first uttered to Martha at Bethany are to be interpreted by us in the reflected light of later disclosures: the personal resurrection of Christ from the grave, and the distinctive promise which he gave, and gives now, that all who believe in him shall surely live for ever.

Here then have we our model and our rule in administering consolation to those that mourn. Grief is always entitled to our respect; but grief should never be made a religion.

Nature must and will have its own expression. Let the mourner weep. Let him recall all that was good in the qualities and life of the departed. Enter with a most generous sympathy into every grief; listen to all which its sobbing voice would utter; and then, remembering that divine truth is anterior and superior to every thing besides, and that now

the heart is mellowed by sorrow, susceptible to impression as it never was before and never may be again, turning away from all the empty consolations of the world, direct the eye always to Him who is the true life of men ; speak of Him who himself tasted death, and who has abolished death ; extracting its sting by the remission of sin. Now is the time to press the question, "Believest thou this?"

You need not be apprehensive of mistake in concentrating thought on the person of Jesus Christ. This was what Christ himself did. He who was ever zealous for the honor of God, faltered not in directing the eye and heart of the living and the dying immediately to himself. It is by such acts on his part that he has furnished proof of his divinity beyond all words of positive assertion. He bids our dying race to look to him, and trust in him as the Resurrection and the Life. We need not speculate *why* it is and *how* it is ; enough that *so* it is ; that Christian believers, in the hour of greatest need, in the depths of sorrow, and amid the waters of death, always find themselves turning with a trustful look to that per-

sonal Redeemer to whom the dying Stephen exclaimed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." At such times it is not enough to have a general faith in an Infinite Spirit, pervading all time and space; it is not enough to reason out some conviction concerning the immortality of the soul, or to question physiology and natural religion as to the probability and modes of a future existence; the only thing appropriate and adequate is, a belief in Him who bore our own nature, entering into complete sympathy with man, and who, in the form of a man, so presents himself at the side of suffering that ignorance may comprehend and utmost infirmity may grasp his aid.

What do we know about the world unseen? What reasonings, what curiosity, what misgivings there have been concerning that impenetrable mystery! Out of this mystery and vagueness and vastness comes the human form of the divine Redeemer. He assures us that there is an unmixed and endless life, and that all which we need to secure it is, to trust ourselves to Him who came to declare it and to confer it. It comforts us beyond all power of

expression to know that those who lived a life of faith upon the earth, and whom death has taken from our arms, are partakers now of a life of joy. We recall what they said in their last hours concerning the preciousness of Christ. Up to the very latest moment that they were with us, they spoke calmly but gratefully of the great Shepherd who was with them in the dark valley; a moment more, they had ceased to breathe, but not to live; for Christ is the Life, and he has said, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live;" and those who have gone from our sight still trusting in him, are full to-day of conscious thought and feeling and life—of life, and nothing but life. But He who has promised this for our consolation, has affirmed also what is more important as it concerns ourselves: "He that liveth and believeth shall never die." We are yet alive, but do we believe? In our ears has Christ announced his own attributes and offices, and turning to each of us he says: "Believest thou this?" There is a resurrection of the dead soul which takes place here on the earth.

There is a life imparted to such as were dead. And the whole of this is confirmed in that act of the soul by which it believes; thinking of Him, trusting in Him, following Him who is the Hope, the Light, the Life of men. "I am the resurrection and the life," says Christ of himself. Convinced of your own guilt and helplessness and mortality, look to Him and say: "I know whom I have believed, and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

PILATE:

The Vacillating Man of the World.

MATT. 27.
MARK 15.
LUKE 23.
JOHN 18: 19.

VIII.

PILATE:

The Vacillating Man of the World.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, arraigned before a mortal man for judgment to be passed upon his claims and character! An eventful thing was it, in the life of any man, to come into personal contact with that mysterious Being, who could read the secret thoughts, and whose every word seemed to have a prophetic relation to future destiny. But it was not peculiar to the days when he was in the flesh for this same divine Person to present himself before men, demanding a verdict upon his own assertions. The prætorium at Jerusalem was not the only place where Jesus Christ has stood to be judged of men. Every day, every Sabbath, every communion he presents himself to human hearts, stirring their

hopes, their fears, their faith, their doubts, their love, their hate, according as they are affected towards him.

It is of Pilate, his character and his conduct—the working and decision of his vacillating mind in regard to Christ the mystic King—that I am now to speak. Because he is immediately associated with that most tragic and atrocious act, the crucifixion of our Lord, it is common to think of him as a paragon of sanguinary cruelty. The description given of him by Josephus must be received with some allowance. Josephus was a Jew, and was never suspected of leniency or impartiality in giving the portraits of the heathen officials who ruled over his subject-country. The facts as they are recorded by the evangelists will not allow us to classify Pilate with men of monstrous and unmixed crime; for he was disturbed by many fears, by activities of conscience, by misgivings, even when he yielded to outward pressure, and by many susceptibilities to a just and truthful impression. Certainly he was the prototype of a large class still living upon the earth.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea under the imperialism of Tiberius Cæsar. The testimony of Tacitus, the Roman annalist, on this point, is very important, for it fixes beyond all question the time when the historic life of our religion began. His words are, "The author of that name (a sect of Christ) who was capitally punished in the reign of Tiberius by Pontius Pilate." Pilate was no instigator of the violent act which hurried our Lord to death, but soon became involuntarily involved in it. It was the chief-priests and Pharisees and rulers of the Jews by whom the Saviour was arrested and arraigned. They dragged him before Annas and Caiaphas the high-priests and the council, or Sanhedrim, and there, upon the charge of blasphemy, in asserting that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, he was by that ecclesiastical court condemned to death. But this sentence the Jews had no power to execute. About forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem, as the Jewish historian informs us, this power of inflicting capital punishment was taken away from the now provincial people, and was vested in the

imperial power only. It was the policy of the Roman government to leave the laws and religion of the countries which they conquered in force, but the power of life and death it reserved in its own hands. Believing that they had their victim at last completely in their power, the priests and scribes, after their ecclesiastical sentence, now resort to the prætoriam of Pilate, for permission to execute their purpose upon the person of our Lord. There was not in all Jerusalem a place more hateful to the Jew than this Gentile palace, the obtrusive sign and seat of heathen domination. Sanctimonious to the last degree, they would not, even on such an errand, enter the judgment-hall, the prætorium itself, but stood around the judgment-bench, which was without. In the early hour of the morning Pilate comes out to meet them. How he was summoned, what were his first impressions and sentiments, we know not. He comes for the first time before us, as he steps out, at this unusual hour, on this extraordinary occasion. Let us judge of what is passing in his mind by his own words. He sees before him the whole

council of the Jews and a great crowd highly excited, holding a prisoner who was bound in their hands. The treatment he had received through that long and eventful night, without sleep, without food, buffeted and spit upon as he had been, must have had its effect upon the pale face of Christ. Is it unnatural to suppose that the heart of Pilate was touched with pity as his eye first fell upon our Lord? "What accusation bring ye against this man?" Such were his first words. Some commentators see more in this question than it will bear. Luther paraphrases it in this manner: "It is marvellous that ye can have any thing to say against a man so celebrated for goodness." We are not informed that Pilate knew any thing of Christ, or had ever seen his person before; and yet the answer which was immediately given by the Jews, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee," implies that there must have been somewhat in the tone, the expression, the manner of Pilate, when he put the question, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" which conveyed the impression that he

was not unmoved by the spectacle before him, nor indisposed to believe that the person in whom he saw so much that was dignified mixed with so much of suffering, might be innocent. This was the first movement of his mind in regard to the Person with whom he is now brought into contact. "If he were not a *malefactor*, we would not have delivered him up unto thee." "Take ye him and judge him according to your law," was the taunting answer of the governor. Be sure this was not the authoritative disposal of the question; it was a shaft of keenest irony aimed at the Jews, and intended to humiliate them by reminding them of their impotence. He intended they should feel that he was something more than the passive instrument of their will: If you judge and condemn a man alone, execute the sentence, *if you can*. The arrow hit the mark; for the confession was immediately extorted from the Jews, whose humiliation was complete, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death." And here have we one of those unconscious fulfillings of prophecy which, like the smooth working of intricate machinery,

one part fitting into another at the right time and the right place, demonstrate the presidency of one designing mind. "This said they," interprets the inspired evangelist, "that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake signifying by what death he should die." Christ had long before said that he should be delivered up to the Gentiles, and that he should be lifted up upon the cross. Had he been put to death by the Jews, neither of these purposes would have been accomplished. Crucifixion was a Roman punishment. The Jews put to death by stoning. Had our Lord been surrendered up into their hands, his sacred person would have been crushed, and instead of being laid in the sepulchre without a bone being broken, it would have been but a mass of bloody fragments.

Finding that Pilate was not disposed to give them permission without inquiring into the case, the Jews announce their accusation. Had the governor been the cruel and sanguinary person which some suppose, he would have despatched the matter summarily, and allowed the people to execute their fell intent;

but he seems to be impressed with the fact that he has some responsibility in the premises, and that he must act the part of a court of revision and appeal. Of great importance is it, for the satisfaction of Christian faith for all time, that the several steps of that process by which the Redeemer of the world was brought to death should all be put upon the record, so that never should it be affirmed, and never imagined, that any stain of a just and well-founded accusation, even from his enemies, was left upon his sacred and adorable name.

The accusation now made by the Jews was (Luke 23:2), that Christ had perverted the nation, and forbidden "to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ, a king." Determined to investigate the matter for himself, Pilate retires into the prætorium, and sends for Jesus to come to him. This is something different from judicial publicity. Behold our divine Lord in private conversation with this Gentile governor! "Art thou the King of the Jews?" It is not necessary to put mockery into this question, as if Pilate

intended to insult Jesus: "Art THOU then the King of the Jews?" Rather let us understand it as a simple and honest inquiry—"*Art* thou then the King of the Jews?" If our Lord had simply answered "*Yes*," or "*No*," there would have been ground for misapprehension. He might appear to protect himself under an ambiguity of words. Our Lord therefore replied in the form of a counter-question; and it must have interested and astonished Pilate to find that this prisoner under examination had the power of probing the heart of his examiner. Jesus answered him: "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" Every word in the question has its meaning. First of all our Lord intended that there should be no place for evasion, for ambiguity. He would have Pilate explain in what sense his question was to be understood. "Do you mean to ask whether I am a king in your own sense of the word, from your point of view as a Roman governor, or do you intend to ask whether I am a king in the theocratic sense, according to the Jewish theology? Explain your own language, and we will then

come to an understanding." More than this is implied in the question of Christ. He reveals Pilate to himself. He touches his conscience. He would have him to see and decide whether he has any honest convictions and purposes of his own, or whether he is under the influence of external and unworthy power. If Pilate had answered the question honestly, when the surgeon's hand touched his pulse, how different might have been the issue of his case. When Christ comes too close, he shrinks and draws back. As the flesh recoils from fire and sharp edges, so did Pilate withdraw himself from the faithful touch of Christ. He tosses off the hand which holds the probe. In lofty scorn he says, "*Am I a Jew?*" What do I know or care about your theological distinctions, your Jewish Messiahship? You are accused by your own people of asserting yourself to be a king; what does this mean? what hast thou done?" The way is now prepared for our Lord to affirm the truth concerning himself. He does not disavow the name of King, but claims it with explanation of its meaning. He is not a king of this world, with

swords and armies and revenues at his control. He is no rival of Cæsar in regard to an earthly monarchy. He has never refused to acknowledge the civil power. He and his disciples have paid tribute to the ruling dynasty. Every accusation which would make him an usurper or a rebel by setting up an earthly kingdom is false. The frequent use of the word *kingdom* in this disclaimer prompts Pilate to put the direct question, "*Art thou a king then?*" "Yes," said Christ, "I am a King. That word which you have said is true. Not a king to fight, but to witness for the truth. My kingdom is not of this world. It is spiritual, but none the less a real kingdom. I wish for no evasion; I ask for no concealment. I do not wish to be acquitted through any ambiguity of language. You shall know the whole of that which your question implies. This is the whole import of my birth, my residence in the world. You have asked me what I have done, and what is the cause of all these Jewish accusations against me. This is my whole offence: I have revealed *truth;* I have testified to the truth; this is my kingly

office. I reign in the realm of truth. Let monarchs wear the trappings of robes and sceptres and crowns; my insignia of power are the words of truth which I have announced, and my supremacy is over the minds and the hearts of men." Disabusing the mind of Pilate of all these ideas of external and political power, defining the nature of his spiritual kingdom, with its kingly assertions of truth, Christ brings the governor and examiner before whom he stands to a critical decision. He informs him that every one who is of the truth hears his voice. What an application is here. Be sure there was an expression of the eye, an intonation of the voice, which gave it an irresistible meaning. "My kingdom is of the truth, and every man who is of the truth heareth me." Pilate, what an eventful moment in your history is here! Whoever desires himself to know that truth is sure to find it. And here and now, if thou wouldst but know it, in this meek, majestic Person, stands THE TRUTH, who could inform you of all things.

A second time the conscience of Pilate shrinks from the touch, and we pass the second

stage in his downward progress. "Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?" Every thing depends upon the tone and emphasis with which these words are uttered. That they were not used by Pilate in an honest sense, as one desirous of knowing the truth, is very plain from the sequel; for he does not even wait for an answer. Had he, with an earnest and candid spirit, put the question to Christ, "*What is truth?*" what revelations would have been made to him! But he was frivolous. He was skeptical. He was indifferent. And yet it is hard not to admit that there was something like despondency and sadness in the tone and spirit of the words—"Truth! what is it?" It is the thorough man of the world who speaks. He has no interest in moral distinctions, and is very impatient under all matters which probe his conscience. No sooner were the words uttered, than he steps forth to the people, and assures them that he finds no fault at all in the man whom they had accused. So shall it stand for ever, out of the mouth of this Roman governor, that no impeachment rested on the character of Christ. What now

shall he do? Instead of following his convictions of what is right, he resorts to an expedient by which probably he would evade the whole matter. He remembers the old Jewish custom of releasing some state prisoner at every annual return of the Passover. There was a man then in confinement for notorious crime. He was accused of robbery and murder. This man Barabbas was under arrest for participation in a most frightful insurrection. Now, thought Pilate, I will propose the alternative to the people to release Barabbas, or Jesus. Surely they cannot hesitate what to do; they will not prefer that this blood-stained culprit should be let loose on the city rather than this quiet and well-behaved Person, whose only offence is, that he has excited the ill-will of the priests by some new claim or assertion in regard to their religion. Little did Pilate know the men with whom he was dealing. He was foiled in this attempt to deliver Jesus out of their hands. Immediately and clamorously they demanded the release of Barabbas; so that Pilate, most unexpectedly and greatly to his perplexity, found that the case of Jesus

was still in his hands, and in some way was to be disposed of. That perplexity was in no wise diminished by a message which was brought to him from his wife, begging him to have nothing whatever to do with this man, for she had suffered much in a dream concerning him. What strange presentiments, what wild and mysterious warnings agitate the soul of this vacillating Pilate while fighting against his own convictions.

Again the Jews repeat their charge against Christ, that he had stirred up the people throughout Judea, beginning from Galilee and passing on to Jerusalem. "What," said Pilate, "is he a Galilean?" Ascertaining that he was, a new expedient for evading responsibility suggests itself to this worried and restless man. "A Galilean; then he belongs to Herod's jurisdiction; and luckily, Herod is now in Jerusalem; I will send him to Herod, and so rid myself of all action in the matter."* Upon this suggestion, Jesus is swept away to con-

* As to the question whether the sending to Herod did not precede the offer to release Barabbas, see Olshausen, vol. 3, pp. 72, 73.

front this sensual, corrupt, brutal prince. Right glad was Herod to see the man of whose fame he had heard, and by whose miracles he hoped to be amused, as by a mountebank. Christ, knowing the man, maintains the dignity of SILENCE. Not a word does he utter in that presence. Mocking him, putting him to derision, dressing him up in some caricature resemblance of royalty: after this ingenious and cruel sport, Herod and his men of war summarily terminate their connection with the affair by sending Jesus back to Pilate.

With what chagrin and dismay did Pilate behold the concourse once more approaching his judgment-hall! Instead of escaping responsibility, he found himself becoming inextricably involved in it, beyond all power of evasion. Again he resorts to expedients, rather than do the right. Finding no fault in Christ, and inclined to save his life, but at the same time, in his weakness, disposed in some degree to gratify the maddened people, he gave direction that Jesus might be scourged. Undoubtedly he intended this as a means of pacifying the Jews, substituting this as a more lenient

sentence than death. It would seem that Pilate was not a spectator of this cruel punishment, but that for decency's sake he withdrew for a season. During this interval the soldiery indulge their hate in all manner of mockery. Little knowing what they did, they platted a crown of thorns—a symbolism most sublime and memorable—and put it on his head. Finding that this act of scourging, instead of pacifying the accusers of Christ, only exasperated them, Pilate goes out to the people, and assures them again that he finds no fault at all with Christ. Standing in their presence, and interposing himself as a breakwater to the foaming madness, the door from the court is opened, and Christ is presented to their sight, the blood trickling from the wounds made by the thorns on his head, the marks of the scourge on his back, and a purple robe about his person. There stands the man whose condition might well move the pity of all. "*Ecce homo!*"—"Behold the man!" says Pilate. It is incredible that these words were uttered in anything like mockery and derision. Rather let us understand them

as intended to convey and excite a real sympathy and compassion. It is very plain that Pilate, in all his indifference about questions of religion, had become profoundly concerned in finding himself entangled with a matter from which he would gladly be rid, especially as he acknowledged the mysterious power which this unknown person appeared to exert over his own movements—"Behold the man!" Instead of pity, the sight inflamed the madness of the concourse, who thirsted for the blood of Christ, and shouted, "*Crucify* him! *crucify* him!" Well, said Pilate—determined to shuffle off all responsibility to the last—well, "Take YE him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him." But this emphasis did not suit the Jews; for if they should assume all the responsibility, and crucify their victim, they might be called to an account for it, and suffer the consequences. Determined to obtain permission from Pilate in due form to execute their purpose, they answered him: "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the *Son of God*." Like a bolt from heaven fell

these words on the ear of Pilate. Here is something new and strange and inexplicable. Before, they had accused the prisoner of usurping political power, of exciting insurrection, of being a King; but now they say that this same person ought to die, because he called himself the *Son of God.* Deeper and deeper grows the mystery. Pilate turns and looks at Christ—that bleeding, pale, bound, derided, yet meek and patient prisoner. He call himself the Son of God! He knows nothing, he cares nothing about the definitions of Judaistic theology; but in that raiment of mockery and in that state of suffering helplessness the Roman magistrate acknowledges that there is something in this claim of *divinity* which awes his own mind; gets hold of him, and masters him. He was afraid. When Pilate heard that new word, Son of God, "HE WAS MORE AFRAID." He looks, he wonders. The very indefiniteness and vagueness of the expression increase his alarm. He withdraws into his house, directs Jesus to be brought to him again; and once more, and once only, he is confronted with our Lord in a private inter-

view. Pilate and Christ together again, and alone; and Pilate, with this fear and dread in his heart, quickly asked, with white lips, "*Whence* art thou?" The question relates to the words just uttered. That he was born in Galilee, he had ascertained before; but now he would touch the mystery of this new and incomprehensible word, "the SON OF GOD." "*Whence* art thou?" And Jesus spake not a word. Silence was an answer. In that impressive stillness, was not the Sufferer preaching to the heart and conscience of Pilate? That is the one great question for all time for all men: "Who is Christ?" "Whence art thou?" We have seen all along how the conscience of Pilate shrunk from every touch of truth. He had gone too far in this perilous process to expect now any satisfaction or relief through a question which is prompted only by *fear*. Had he not before been told by Christ that he was King in the realm of truth, and that every one who loved truth would acknowledge himself a subject? Pilate had written out his own condemnation before, as one that disliked truth, and hated the light;

for great was the violence which he had done to his own convictions, as stirred already by the words and person of Jesus. Therefore, when a strange curiosity, impelled by personal fear, prompted the question, "*Whence art thou?*" our Lord was silent. At first Pilate wondered. But that silence continued, his condition became awkward and embarrassing. Wonder gave place to wounded pride, and he was forced to break the silence himself: "Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Then Jesus answered: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee *from above*." The haughty presumption of this Gentile governor is brought at once unwillingly before the almightiness of God. Be sure this *from above* has no reference to higher earthly magistracy; it connects the transaction immediately and inseparably with the ideas of God and supremacy and accountability. The governor was mastered, and himself put to silence. The prisoner, by a few smooth and quiet words, had tamed his restless pride, without reliev-

ing him of his fear. From that moment Pilate was determined that he would release Jesus. But he had begun to slide when he practised his first delay, his first irresolution, his first violence to conscience; and there was no stoppage to his slippery descent. He went to the people, and announced his purpose. But they knew his weakness, and were determined to avail themselves of his vacillation. The Jews cried out: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." They touched the man in his weakest point. Accusations against him for maladministration had already gone up to Rome, and he was afraid, if the Jews repeated the charge to his imperial master, he would be called to account, and displaced from office. This new jealousy for the rights of Cæsar on the part of the Jews, who ordinarily made no secret of their intense hatred for the Roman authority, he did not pause to weigh. He himself was influenced by the meanest of all motives, the fear of losing an office, rather than do what he knew to be right. Yielding to this worldly suggestion, the last

struggle was over, and he went down before the rushing tide. The stern, unrelenting bigotry of the Jews pressed him on with resistless power. If he had hitherto any honest purpose to do what was right, that purpose was swept away by the fear of personal disadvantage. To the honor of Christ, and to his own shame, by a most impressive symbolism, washing his hands before the people, Pilate assured them that he found no fault in Jesus Christ; and after all these several attempts to evade responsibility by expedients of various kinds, he yielded up the person of our Lord, and gave his consent to the crucifixion.

In dismissing the evangelical narrative at this point, it is not impertinent to add what we derive from other sources. I make no reference to what is questionable; there were *Acta Pilati*, spurious productions, which we pass unnoticed; and there is no doubt that Pilate made a report of this case to the emperor at Rome, though it is lost; but from other and reliable sources we learn that, as Judas failed even in his reward, so Pilate

found that the last motive by which he was foiled proved too weak to help him. He was recalled; he was exiled in disgrace from Rome into Gaul; and the traveller who now descends the Rhone sees, in the south of France, still standing the very tower from which, as tradition says, Pilate precipitated himself to the dreadful end of the suicide.

The character of Pilate is briefly summed. He was a thorough man of the world, destitute of all high principle, and sacrificing conscience to circumstances. Inclined to do right, when to do wrong worked against his advantage; aspiring for the honor and power which come from man; indifferent and skeptical as to the rewards which come from God. He has a conscience, but dares not to follow it. He has perceptions of what is right—impulses, misgivings, fears, susceptibilities; but every thing that was good was superficial, while within all was weak, and wavering, and vacillating. The best opportunities ever enjoyed by a mortal for knowing the truth were his, in personal intercourse with Christ; but for want of earnestness and sin-

cerity and candor, all these served only to exhibit his folly and enhance his guilt.

What an effect, think you, was produced on Pilate when he heard that the man whom he had suffered to be crucified had *risen from the dead?* Suppose you he was a party or a dupe to the fraud invented by the priests, that the body of Christ had been stolen, while his Roman guards, at the known peril of their lives, had slept? While the story was told to the credulous, did not Pilate and his wife, as with a sword in their hearts, talk together about their connection with this strange mystery which, when they thought it past, returns with a deeper shadow and a more dreadful warning?

Think not that we have here a mere historic tableau for intellectual entertainment. The scene is directly related to ourselves. Christ, the Son of God, still lives; and he presents himself before the minds of men with a degree and power of evidence which surpass all that he exhibited when here in the flesh; and before every man he awaits a verdict. He comes not as a prisoner, in bonds,

his glory under eclipse; nor yet as a Judge, in the terrors of omnipotence; but in the attitude and offices of love. The head which drooped upon the cross wears a crown. He asserts a kingly claim over our hearts and lives; asking for our faith, our gratitude, our loyalty, our devotion to him; and necessity is laid upon us to make a choice, and to express it. In your misapprehension, you may wish that you could evade the responsibility of making that decision; but this is impossible. Rival claimants for your heart necessitate a choice. "Is it this Man, or Barabbas?" Shall it be for Christ, or against him? You have tried delays, you have practised evasion, you have employed expedients, you have manifested indifference; but Christ is before you again, and you must give your verdict. You need no dreams, no mysterious warnings to convince you that this divine Claimant is related inevitably to your eternal destiny. Your life, your immortal life, is somehow woven in and dependent on his. Presentiments shall I call them? convictions rather, clear and strong and rational, if you would allow them air

and voice, are in your soul, concerning the name and power and jurisdiction of Jesus Christ. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now have they no cloak for their sin." According to this equitable rule, is not our guilt greater than was that of Pilate, if we withhold our earnest convictions from Him whose life and offices and truth are before us, with stronger light and more resistless evidence? "What is truth?" "Whence art thou?" What opportunities and auspices are those in which we can propose these cardinal questions. If we will but urge them with all candor and earnestness and sincerity, how sure it is that He will reveal himself in us, so that we shall bend before him in most grateful discipleship. Our great peril is in Pilatical vacillation; in that weakness which seeks delay and evasion and indifference, instead of acting promptly according to the convictions which are already in the soul. To-day Christ, in a certain sense, is on trial before us all. In these living hearts, in every one to-day, there will be a judgment of some sort passed upon his sacred person.

"Every one that is of the truth heareth his voice." If you would prove these blessed affinities with Christ, yield yourselves to the truth which he has announced, and follow him most trustfully and obediently.

Be not content with concealed and reserved convictions; give them utterance in open court. Be prompt, be open, be resolute, be decided; and of this be sure, the time is at hand when you will have no reason to be ashamed of that verdict which numbers you with the disciples of the Son of God.

Long ago Pilate has stood to be judged himself in the presence of the glorified Redeemer. In that presence we too shall stand. Pilate was afraid when he heard these words, the *Son of God*. You too have your secret fears and misgivings, when your thoughts fly onward to the judgment-seat of Christ. We shall all be there, either on the right hand or the left of the Judge. Where do we hope to be? where should we wish to be? where do we intend to be? with those who denied Christ, of whom he will be ashamed, or with those who confessed him, whom he also will confess?

This process of assortment has begun, and will go on for ever. Behold the communion-table, where Christ comes to us. Behold the judgment-seat, where we shall stand before him. "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." We lay hold of the skirts of our great High Priest, and prefer any thing to the act of disbelieving, denying, forsaking, despising, rejecting the Redeemer of our souls!

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

MARY MAGDALENE;

Love Rewarded.

JOHN 20:1–18.

IX.

MARY MAGDALENE:

Love Rewarded.

The scène before us is the interview between Mary Magdalene and Jesus Christ, at the sepulchre from which he had just risen. Such an interview was never before or since. She the first person of all the human family to whom our Lord revealed himself after his resurrection, and these the *first words* which he uttered after the silence of the tomb.

It was at three o'clock in the afternoon of Friday that Christ bowed his head and expired. The time when a friend dies is the last to be forgotten in our domestic annals. It was such a year, such a month, such a day, such an hour, and such a minute. That Christ actually died—that fact so essential—is confirmed alike by friends and enemies. The Jewish law expressly forbade the exposure of crucified bodies upon the Sabbath; and as the Sabbath now at hand, the first after the Passover,

was a "great day," one of unusual sacredness, the Jews sent to Pilate the request that he would direct the Roman guards to expedite the death of the three then suspended upon the cross, as otherwise they might have lingered for days; and so their bodies might be taken away before the going down of the sun. The order was issued, and the soldiers broke the legs of the two malefactors. Proceeding to the body of Christ, to their surprise they found that he was dead already. There was no need of further violence. When, a little later in the afternoon, Joseph of Arimathea went in to Pilate and asked that the body of Christ might be given to him, Pilate marvelled if he were already dead, knowing how lingering this method of execution was; so he sends for the centurion who was in command that day, from whom he receives the official report that death had actually taken place. Physiologists have conjectured, if not demonstrated, that Christ died of a broken heart, the actual rupture of this vital organ. Though they broke not his legs—unconsciously fulfilling, in the person of the Paschal Lamb, the ancient Scrip-

ture, "A bone of him shall not be broken"—one thing was done which the apostle John himself saw, and which he records with an emphatic affirmation of its truth, as an eye-witness. A soldier pierced the side of Christ with a lance, inflicting a wound which of itself would have been mortal, out of which came blood and water, and which was the last proof that life was extinct. The resurrection, therefore, was not resuscitation from a swoon, it was restoration to life after a real and complete death.

The evening was drawing on, at which time—the appearance of the stars—the Sabbath began, when Joseph, assisted by Nicodemus, took the body of our Lord, and prepared it for its burial. Those who had been his avowed disciples took no part in the transaction. Stricken with terror, they had fled early in the day. It could never be said by any who should be disposed to question the reality of his resurrection, that there was any collusion on the part of the eleven disciples with a feigned and histrionic death. Time did not allow the final embalmment of the

body, so it was simply wrapped in clean linen, with a mixture of spices, and then was it borne to a sepulchre hewn out of a rock in an adjacent garden, which Joseph had prepared for his own family, and in which no man as yet had ever been laid. And these two men, when they had finished their reverent act, together rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and then withdrew. And Mary Magdalene and the other women who had loved Christ and ministered to him sat in the garden over against the sepulchre, beholding *where* and *how* his body was laid. So the night wore on. On the day following—our Saturday—the Jewish Sabbath, the chief priests, the instigators of the crucifixion, reminded of what "the deceiver" had frequently said as to his rising again, plied Pilate for additional securities over the sepulchre. The mandate was given, "Ye have a watch, ... make it as sure as ye can." So they went and sealed the stone; and when all was made secure, they ordered a detachment of soldiers for a guard.

All these incidents—the number of per-

sons implicated, the minute details of Christ's crucifixion and interment—go to corroborate the record concerning the reality of his death.

A memorable day was that Sabbath in Jerusalem! Who can surmise all that was felt by the disciples when they thought of him as a mangled and buried corpse, who, as they had trusted, was to redeem Israel? Mary the mother of Jesus, and the other women, and John and Peter, had no voice for song in the worship of that Sabbath. If the scribes and priests felt that their malice was gratified, it was not manifested by loud exultation, for there had been too many portents and mysteries to allow of that; rather were there misgivings and tremors. The sun never went down on heavier hearts or more afflicted mourners. Truly this was "the power of darkness." Never did Death hold such a victim before; and never was his gloomy power more effectually expressed by stones, and seals, and guards, and silence.

The very night when the women whom we have already named returned from the garden of Joseph, they made preparations of spices

for a more complete embalming of the body of Christ; and so they rested on the Sabbath-day.

The Sabbath passed. While it was yet dark, just in the early dawn, they went forth with the courage of love to perform their pious office. The foremost in the group was Mary Magdalene; so called from Magdala, the town in Galilee in which she lived. The utmost wrong has been done to her name by the general belief that she was once a woman of disreputable life. There is not a word in the New Testament to countenance such an opinion. There is no reason whatever for inferring that she was the woman who crept into the house of the Pharisee to anoint and kiss the feet of Christ. That woman was a penitent outcast; loving much because forgiven much. Let her not be identified without proof with Mary Magdalene. The first we know of the latter is upon the occasion of her being relieved of demoniacal possessions by the word of Jesus. A mysterious affliction was that, but surely nothing which involves the idea of a dissolute life. Her associates

were of the most respectable class; one of her companions is the wife of a man holding an important office in the king's household; and they all appear to have been possessed of sufficient substance out of which to minister to their Friend and ours, Jesus of Nazareth. Wretched as she had been on account of her physical or mental sufferings, grateful as she was for relief, it is most unfortunate that her name, the Magdalen, should have been appropriated, in all modern languages and art, to that particular class who have been rescued from a life of infamy.

While these grateful, loving, and pious mourners were wending their way out of the city and along the unfrequented road in the dusk of the morning twilight, an event had occurred within the garden for which neither they nor the world were prepared. The guards were pacing before the sepulchre or reclining at their posts, when there was a great earthquake, and an angel from heaven descended, and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre, and sat upon it. He uttered not a word. His silent calmness

displays the consciousness of power. His countenance was like lightning; and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. When they had recovered their senses, they fled away with utmost haste.

Had this narrative been of human origin, doubtless we should have had at this point a high-wrought description of the reappearance of our Lord among the living, such as we find in works of fiction when dealing with the marvellous; instead of which, we are not apprized of the exact time when our Lord issued from the sepulchre. Nothing is said of his dignity, his mien, his sublime force. Just where art and fable would have been most elaborate, truth is most simple and reserved, even while recording a marvel such as no pen had described before.

While they were pursuing their way without the city through the suburban vineyards, the women were wondering how they should succeed in gaining access to the sepulchre. Some of them had seen the size of the stone, and the strength which was requisite in rolling it against the door, and how should they

alone be able to roll it away. While they were conversing about this perplexity, Mary Magdalene, who appears on all occasions to be a person of great ardor and earnestness, presses on in advance, and to her astonishment sees that the stone is removed, and the door of the sepulchre is wide open. No other thought appears to be in her mind than would be in yours when approaching the tomb where, two days before, a friend had been deposited, and finding most unexpectedly that it had been disturbed. Her first thought must have been, that the sepulchre was opened for no good purpose, but for some new indignity on the part of those who had most cruelly put her friend to death. She had not so much as an imagination as to his restoration to life. She is possessed by one thought—the grave has been rifled, and for some evil purpose the resting-place of the dead has been invaded. What could have been done within that tomb which she had herself seen so effectually secured! Without pausing to investigate or reflect, she sweeps by her companions, flees back to the city, finds Peter and John, and

informs them what she had seen. Excitement is too intense for talking. We have no record of what these disciples said; only of what they did. They ran, without any delay or order, to the garden. John, the youngest, reaches the sepulchre first, and his first glance confirms the report of Mary Magdalene. While he stands without, stooping down and looking within, Peter arrives, and with his usual impulsiveness, went into the sepulchre, where John followed him. They are wondering what could have become of the body. As yet, according to John's recorded confession, they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. One thing arrests their attention. All appears to be decent and orderly. There are no signs of ruffianism. The linen clothes had not been stolen; neither were they torn or ruffled. They were disposed most decorously, and the napkin which had been around his head was carefully folded and placed by itself. All this does not look like violence or haste such as might have been expected from enemies; yet who but enemies would or could have invaded that sanctity?

Did Joseph know any thing of the occurrence? Could Nicodemus give them any information? Could they discover any thing about it in the city? In a tumult of emotion, they hasten back to the city, and Mary Magdalene is left alone at the sepulchre. She stood without, weeping. All her tumultuous emotions of grief and love and wonder find expression in tears and sobs. Many a stricken heart before and since, like Mary, has mourned at the grave. She could only see the vacant niche where the body of her Friend had been laid. She stoops down, and gazes on the spot. Presently the tomb grows bright, and two forms are seen, white and resplendent, the one at the head and the other at the feet where the body had been. "And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." She is denied the sad satisfaction of paying the last offices of friendship to the sacred form which, beyond a doubt, is subject to she knows not what neglect and indignity. While she is thus replying, she is conscious

that some one is approaching behind her, for she hears his step; and casting her eyes backward, sees his form distinctly as she could through her flowing tears. She did not recognize who it was, and supposed, as we afterwards learn, that it was the gardener. But it was Jesus. She was listless as to who it was at first, her whole soul intent on one thing. And Jesus saith unto her, in a tone which she did not recognize: "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" The *first* words uttered by our Lord after his resurrection, but destined to be repeated in a higher sense, with a better import, as the grand consolation of the world to the end of time. "Why weepest thou?" Occupied with one regret, perplexed by one marvel, supposing that he was the keeper of the garden, a ray of hope gleaming upon her mind that now the mystery of the morning would be explained, not repeating her reply just made to the angels, but completing it, as if what she had already said to them must have been overheard also by the person who now accosts her, she says: "Sir, if *thou* have borne him hence, tell me where

thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." What a gentle confession of sincere love is here! She would save every one else from trouble, if she could only find the object of her search. She would protect it from all indignity, and see that it was interred most decently and affectionately. The time has come when, in a manner the most natural, the most simple and proper, our divine Lord is to manifest himself to the first one who greets him after his resurrection. Not the last, blessed be God, to whom he reveals himself as a loving Saviour; not the only one; for others too shall wait and weep, and seek and love, to whom, through all centuries of time, Christ will show himself as he who was dead, and is alive for evermore! Happy art thou, Mary of Magdala, for thy patient, sincere love—ministering to Christ all the way from Galilee, standing by his cross, braving a cruel and insulting heathen soldiery, and weeping for him who wept not for himself, waiting now so long at his empty tomb—this thy love shall not go unblessed. "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid

him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, *Mary!*" That voice she has heard before. That intonation she cannot mistake: "Mary!" She turns herself fully round. One word only breaks from her lips—"*Rabboni!*" "My dear Master!"—as she falls at his feet. There, we may suppose, she lies in a most passionate expression of her gratitude and love and joy. This was an act of artless impulse. Afterwards, when he showed himself to the other women, they held him by the feet in fervid embrace, and worshipped him. So Mary would have held him, in her sudden revulsion of feeling, as if to satisfy every doubt, express every delight, and detain him from a second departure. Then Jesus saith unto her, "Touch me not: for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."

It would not be for edification to employ time with the detail of the various interpretations which have been put upon these words—"*Touch me not*"—some of them plau-

sible, and some ingenious and subtle. We incline to that which is the most simple and natural. The principal thing in the verse is very plain, namely, the announcement that he was, at a time not very remote, to ascend from the earth to heaven and to God. That which is plain is to be the interpreter of that which is obscure; that which is paramount must explain what is subordinate. The main thing, concerning which there can be no difference of opinion, is, that Mary was to inform the disciples of Christ of the event, not yet accomplished, but next to ensue, in the sublime programme of redemption, his ascension to the skies. All that is intermediate is of small account. Her commission includes, of course, the announcement of his resurrection. She had seen him, and he had told her, and through her all his brethren, what was next to occur in the completion of his great work. Keeping this in mind, it is of very small consequence which meaning we attach to the phrase, *Touch me not*, if we only avoid what is farfetched, and adopt what is most in keeping with the facts and the occasion. There she lies, cling-

ing to his feet, in an ecstacy of joy. And there she would have remained, we know not how long, as varied emotions were surging through her soul. Is she afraid that he will again disappear from her sight? would she detain him by her fond embrace? would she satisfy herself by a continuous touch that indeed it was her Master, and she was subject to no illusion of her senses? was she content with expressing her unspeakable joy by these natural methods of clinging to his person and kissing his feet? How pertinent would it be for our Lord, in either of these shades of feeling, after allowing the first impulse of her wondering joy, to direct her to stay there no longer; to pass no more time in these acts; for he was not yet parted from the world; he should remain yet longer before his ascension; both she and his brethren would see him again before that event should occur which now was the most important of all, as they should understand the consummation and success of his redemption, his ascension to that God and Father who, in a new sense, becomes our God and Father, through that new relation which

we sustain to Him who is not ashamed to call us "brethren."

Leaving what ensued in other manifestations which Christ made of himself before his ascension to heaven, we recur to the event authenticated in this interview with Mary, as the most momentous which ever occurred upon the earth.

Like Mary, let us visit the sepulchre, stoop down, and gaze within it. I do not mean the sepulchre of Christ, but the resting-place of man, the entombment of the human body, the end of life—and I was almost committed to the venturesome act of asking you for one moment to put out of mind what is now so familiar, the resurrection of Christ, and all the hopeful consequences of that great event. Mary Magdalene was not the first of our race who went to the grave to weep. What a dark, cold, narrow, lonely place it is! Here we bring one friend after another, never, never more to return. "Dust to dust; ashes to ashes." Here we shall at length be brought ourselves. Here we shall be for ever excluded from all which is done under the sun, as

much as if we never had existed. The noise of the world will keep on, but we shall not heed it. No voice, no motion, no life; buried beneath the ground. "If a man die, shall he live again?" A tree is cut down; but the vital sap is in the root, and straightway it sendeth up its new and thrifty shoots. Will the dead ever revive? Is this the end of him who was the sublunary lord of creation—corruption and the worm? Is there another life? What are its conditions? How shall it be attained? Weep, mourner, weep at the sepulchre, both for the dead and the living. Knock at the barred door of the tomb, whence comes back no sound but the sullen echo of thy grief, and wonder and fear.

So was the tomb before Jesus himself entered it, to rise again. His resurrection has changed all the conditions of our being, present and future, and is the crowning proof of his divine mission; the last act which was necessary to authenticate and finish the redemption of the human race. There is no other fact which implies and proves so much as the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

dead. Early in his ministry, when the Jews sought of him a sign of his Divine authority, he said unto them: "Destroy *this temple*, and in three days I will raise it up." "He spake of the temple of his body; and when he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this"—which seemed enigmatical to them at the time—"and they believed the Scriptures and the word which Jesus had said." Whether it was at the gate of the temple, or on Mars Hill at Athens, or before Festus at Cesarea, wherever the apostles preached, this was the fact and the doctrine which they announced—Jesus and his resurrection; for this included and covered all other facts and truths which it is important for us to believe. In the argument of the inspired apologist for the general resurrection of men [1. Cor. 15], the whole structure rests, as on a corner-stone, upon the fact that Jesus Christ himself rose from the dead. If Christ did not rise, then our faith is vain; we have no revelation, no light, no Saviour. Then our deceased friends have utterly perished; then we are in our sins, and nothing is

before us but gloom and extinction. But now *is* Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that slept. *Slept*—a new word in human speech; "for since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." Come, let us visit the sepulchre again. Be not afraid, for we go to meet there our risen Lord; and his words are gentle: "Why weepest thou?" Propound your questions now, and renew those inquiries which came back so dolefully before, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Yes, "because I live, ye shall live also." "What, is not the tomb the end and extinction of man?" No. "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." "Is there another life beyond and besides that of the body?" "I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God; and where I am, there ye shall be also." But death is still before me, unavoidable, the disgust and abhorrence of my nature. "Death is yours," says the great Conqueror, who has vanquished the destroyer, and proved himself the Lord of life. "The grave! the grave! it seems as dark and lonely as ever." "Say not

so," replies he who could not be holden within its walls of stone; who had power to lay down his life, and power to take it up again. What was safe for the Precursor is safer now for all his followers. Any question which fear, or grief, or helplessness may propose now at the sepulchre, shall have its answer of good cheer from Him who met and despoiled Death. How much is included in that one word, *death!* The progeny of sin, the dread agent of retribution. That one word which is the expression of all that is terrific and repulsive and painful in any and every world. And Jesus Christ proves himself the Redeemer of the human race, in the act of enduring death himself, and then rising victorious over it. This one event proves, by the majesty of facts, and not by uncertain reasoning, that the Being who invites our faith in himself has shown that Death is disarmed; that there is a power superior to his dread and cold touch. We come to the sepulchre now, though it be with reverent step, sorrow bearing her burden there with a most becoming awe, yet it is with thanks to God, who giv-

eth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the Sabbath-day, for ever to commemorate his resurrection, joy should return to the cheek which once was blanched with fear, and songs to the lips which before were mute with agony. The very disciples who were stricken with fear when the Lord was crucified and buried, afterwards, when they saw him alive, returned to Jerusalem with great joy. What in the universe should occasion us gladness, if it be not this assurance—that Jesus Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, and that we too, conformable unto his death, may be made partakers of his resurrection? Come to the vacant sepulchre of Christ, and sing for joy. Death is abolished; let us rejoice and be glad. Angels, those spirits of purity and love, hasten to meet us here with their message of joy. They too are interested in the redemption of Christ; for they sung on the night of his advent; they ministered to the sufferer in the garden of agony; they rejoice over every sinner that repenteth; and they bear the spirits of the

righteous to the bosom of God. Heaven and earth, angels and men, meet happily together at the open tomb of Christ. Sorrow may be for a night; joy cometh in the morning. With grateful hearts, with a head lifted up, and with a full-toned voice should we ever repeat the great articles of our faith: "I believe in Jesus Christ, who was crucified, who died, and was buried; who rose again from the dead; and who is now at the right hand of God: I believe in the forgiveness of sins, in the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." These are the few sublime facts which give dignity to existence, tranquillity to fear, and hope to futurity. Coming to take away the *sin* of the world, the Son of God takes away also all its consequences; "through death, destroying him that had the power of death, and delivering those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." "Made like unto us," whom he calls his brethren, by taking upon himself a nature which is subject to the humiliating necessity of death, He is also our Divine Deliverer, the Restorer of that which

was lost, through the "power of an endless life."

Amid all such assurances of joy, one thing alone demands our personal concern; even that we become identified with Christ by acts of intelligent trust. His mediatory life does not avail for our advantage by the force of a natural law which consults not our will, but by a moral adaptation which requires our own choice and judgment and consent. "If ye then be risen with Christ," says the Scripture, "set your affection on things above." "If ye be risen with Christ"—a condition of our present life; a condition which is indispensable, if we would insure for ourselves the benefits which Christ conveys. As Christ rose from the dead, so we must now rise from spiritual death, and live a new life. The greatest of all promises, all that is in God's gift for man, are made sure to those who *believe* on Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification. Do you ask why Mary Magdalene was the one chosen to whom first of all Christ showed himself after his res-

urrection? This we know—she trusted in him, and she loved him; she *waited* at his sepulchre; she sought, she looked, she wept; and if we would have Christ reveal himself to us, we too must seek, and wait, and long, and trust, and love. This is spiritual resuscitation. This is life in the best sense; the quickening of thought, going forth to seek Christ; the stirring of the soul's affections towards the great Object of confidence and love. To one so disposed, Christ will manifest himself as he does not to the world. To one so inclined to seek his favor, God will make known what is "the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, THE HOPE OF GLORY."

CONVERSATION OF CHRIST

WITH

PETER:

The Restored Penitent.

JOHN 21:15-22.

X.

PETER:

The Restored Penitent.

This was the third time that Christ had shown himself to his disciples after his resurrection. In his previous interviews with the apostolical group we have very little information concerning the attitude of their own minds. We have the words of Christ addressed to them; very few of their words to him. It is natural to suppose that they were not yet fully at ease. They had not yet completed their self-adjustment in reference to those marvellous events through which they were then passing. They had received directions from Christ to return to Galilee, where he promised to meet them. The scene of the incidents now to be described was that bright, deep inland sea which had been so often associated with the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Here it was that the principal personages in

the company of disciples formerly pursued their occupation as fishermen. It was when they were in the act of casting their nets in this very lake that Peter and James and John had been called to the discipleship of Christ. Here it was, when they were afraid in a violent squall, that Christ had stilled the waves and the winds to a perfect calm by the simple utterance of his command. Here it was that he was seen, through the gloom of night, walking upon the surface of the water, as if it had been a marble floor. It was in the villages and cities which looked down from the adjacent hills upon this sheet of water that most of the wonderful works of Christ had been performed. A fitting place, most surely, for our Lord again to meet his disciples; for every object reminded them of him.

Precisely the posture of their minds when resorting to their old haunts we cannot define. There must have been a strange mixture of thoughts and emotions. They were like insects in the very act of transition from the chrysalis state. They might be compared to the animals on the sixth day of creation, some

of whose limbs were free and agile, while others still adhered to the sod out of which they were summoned into life. Yet we cannot go so far as some, who detect a disposition on the part of the apostles to abandon the whole enterprise as a failure and delusion. We have heard of some interpreters who construe the words of Peter, when lingering on the shores of the sea of Galilee—"I go a fishing"—as a confession of disappointment; as if he was ready to abandon all connection with the mysterious person who now seemed to be the denizen of the air or parts unknown. Nevertheless, we cannot believe that these seven men, as they swung that night in their boat, were altogether at ease in their minds. They were not over-talkative. Thomas must have reproached himself for his incredulity, and Peter must have felt an unusual heaviness at heart when he recalled his own perfidy and blasphemy and cowardice. An air of sadness must have been on all these fishermen throughout that long and weary night. The hours wore away, during which their toil was fruitless. When the morning broke, they were

hailed by a stranger from the shore: "Have you any fish?" The answer was very curt and monosyllabic, as was natural: "No." "Cast your net on the right side of your boat, and you shall catch them." Without a thought who it was or why he gave the direction, they did as they were bidden, and their net enclosed so many that they were not able to draw it in. Suddenly the truth flashes across the mind of John. The wonder is, that it did not occur to them all—to Peter and the other son of Zebedee—for it was a repetition of the very act which occurred, in the same place, about three years before, when they were first called to follow Jesus of Nazareth. The gentlest love has the quickest instinct, and he who had leaned on Jesus' bosom at the supper, now pulling at the ropes of the net, said in a low voice to Peter, "This must be the Lord." The suggestion was enough; coincident no doubt with the surmises stirring already in his own mind. Girding his coat about him, without further question or delay, Peter sprang into the sea and struck for the shore. Fast as their oars

could be plied, the whole of the boat's company follow, dragging their net with them.

Nothing is recorded of the first words which passed between these disciples and their Master. They seem to have been hushed with awe. Though they were now convinced that it was their Master, they did not presume to interrogate him as to his appearance, but waited for his own explanations. Soon as they had landed, they saw a fire of coals already kindled, in preparation for a meal. Why should we pause to discuss the probabilities of its origin? If left by some other party, that would be nothing strange. If prepared by our Lord himself, anticipating the wants of his wearied friends, this surely was in keeping with his character, and with the gentle, kind care which he always had exercised in behalf of his disciples; nor is there any thing in the act, allowing it to have been miraculous, which should excite incredulity—the lesser fading in the power of the greater. If the meal of which they now partook together there upon the shore was not passed in silence, the conversation is not reported;

while it is affirmed that the astonished disciples did not feel at liberty to question their Lord as to his identity. All this, however, is introductory to what follows: that personal conversation with Peter which evidently is the main subject of the chapter.

Nothing could have been more kind, more gentle, more skilful than the mode in which our Lord proceeds to deal with this now penitent disciple. We are not informed that any thing had ever passed between Jesus and Peter since the resurrection which could be regarded by the latter as his complete reinstatement in the favor of his Lord. It was true that, when Mary Magdalene and the other women were bidden, at the vacant tomb of Christ, to announce his resurrection to the disciples, a special mention is made of Peter: "Go tell his disciples *and Peter*"—as if without this specification the disciple who had disowned his Master might conclude that he was disowned now by him, and that he had no right to rejoice with others in view of the tidings which to them were full of joy. Twice, if not thrice, Christ had shown himself to this apostle since he rose

from the dead. But as yet we hear not one word which had passed between them relative to the painful subject of his defection. We cannot but think that Peter still had many misgivings as to what were to be his relations to that Master whom he had so grievously wronged. He had indeed been sorely afflicted because of his grievous sin. He had wept bitterly over it. Never could he forgive himself on account of it. He had reason to expect the sharpest upbraiding. Surely he was disposed to chide himself. So may we suppose his mind alternated between hope and fear, ill at ease with himself, and quite in suspense. And now for the first time there was to be a full understanding of the terms on which he was to stand with his Master. We, who are so often exhorted to restore the fallen in the spirit of meekness, will do well to study the whole scene for the inimitable method in which our Lord dealt with this honest disciple. The occasion itself was well chosen. It was not in the first wild burst of emotion consequent upon the flying tidings of the resurrection morning, but when the mind had recov-

ered a more sedate and tranquil condition. I am disposed to believe that the conversation was private. If not absolutely so, it was certainly without that degree of publicity which would have entailed somewhat of mortification. The very same words, uttered in public and in private, would be susceptible of different intentions. John was a witness of the interview; perhaps more; perhaps all of the seven. If they were, faithfulness and gentleness were so skilfully mingled in the words that there was no needless opening of the wound; nothing more than was necessary to insert the oil and the wine.

It was after they had dined that Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" In this question there is the very mildest form of reproof, reduced to the very minimum, so that to a hasty eye it would not appear at all; yet being there, it is just in the form and degree which were necessary to give completeness to the act of restoration. There could not be a full and satisfactory understanding between the parties, if there had been no allusion whatever

to the past; yet that allusion is made with all the delicacy conceivable; an allusion by way of suggestion, rather than direct and positive charge. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Here is no taunt, no upbraiding; but there is just so much of reference to what had occurred before as was necessary; as if Christ foresaw the uneasiness which the reference would produce, and was desirous of mitigating it to the utmost. The secret cause of Peter's defection was, his self-confidence, his vain boasting. When he was told by his Lord that all the disciples would forsake him, Peter exclaimed: "Though all men should deny thee, yet will not I." So had he expressed himself before the arrest of his Master. So loud and boastful were his words. Nevertheless, he was the first to deny his Lord. The storm of his passionate grief, excited by the mild eye of Christ turned upon him in the judgment-hall, has passed, and now Christ says: "Simon, ... lovest thou me *more than these?*" Though it was so mild and gentle—the mildest and gentlest that reproof could be—the answer of Peter shows that he under-

stood and felt it. He does not affirm that he loved his Master more than did the other disciples. He is ashamed of his former rashness and self-confidence. He knows more of himself now than he does of others. He begins to have somewhat of that lowliness of mind which esteems others better than one's self. He contents himself, therefore, with the honest asseveration of his love: "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." A second time the same question was put; a second time the same answer was returned. When for the *third* time the question was repeated, significantly, emphatically: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" the disciple saw the intent of the triple interrogative. It was not to give an *unnecessary* pain, for the pain which was thus excited was needful, absolutely so—the touch of the probe on that wound which waited a cure. Three times had Peter denied Christ—over and over and over again—with cumulative stress. When he saw that his Master evidently intended by that triple repetition of the question to remind him of his triple denial, Peter was grieved. He remembered his

offence, over which he had wept before, and over which he weeps now again. "Perhaps," he soliloquized, "I shall never be restored to the confidence of my Lord again. Perhaps he sees other perils to which I am exposed, in which my weakness and dishonor will a second time be enacted. He foretold before my former temptation, that Satan had desired to have me, that he might sift me like wheat; perhaps his eye foresees a second apostacy, and he distrusts me, as well he may." So the penitent renews his grief. He is not as one put upon the rack, whose bones are disjointed and broken, but as one in the hands of love, who is brought only into that form of sorrow which is the precursor of consolation and a cure—that kind of grief which has a blessing in it; the child of truth and honesty, and leading on to carefulness and sincerity and truth again. The reproof administered, the balm was not far removed. The question asked and answered once, the restorative direction was given immediately, to be repeated just as often as were the query and the reply. "Feed my lambs."

"*Lovest* thou *me?*" This is the one test question of our religion; for he that loveth is born of God. Careful criticism has noticed that, in the original Greek, two different words are used in the question and the answer, to represent what in our version appears one and the same, *love:* "Lovest thou me?"—"Ἀγαπᾷς με;" it is the word which, throughout the New Testament, denotes the high reverential quality which defines the religious sentiment: God's love to man; man's love to God. In making his reply, Peter does not adopt this word, but another, "σὺ οἶδας ὅτι φιλῶ σε." It is the word which expresses rather the sentiment of a human affection. Is this a mere accident? Just at this moment Peter might have shrunk, through a sense of his own weakness, from making any demonstrative expression of a high religious sentiment; but this he could do with the fullest conviction of his own infirmities: assert, in all honesty, his personal attachment to his Master. So he does, most heartily: "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." Notwithstanding all which I did in the hour of peril, of my weakness and temp-

tation, "thou knowest that I *love* thee." The same the second time. In the *third* question, our Lord changes the word himself, adopting that which Peter had twice used—"φιλεῖς με;" Do you indeed have this strong affection for me? The last answer of the disciple is intensified: "Lord, thou knowest *all* things"—not me only, as before—"thou knowest that I love thee." This honest, hearty expression of his love—accompanying as it did three repeated allusions to his previous defection—was intended, and so was received, as the confession of his repentance. That confession reiterated, the word and the act of restoration ensue immediately. The two are always associated together in the Divine purpose, if not in human consciousness—as light and its shadow. "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin;" the confession and the pardon simultaneous and inseparable. "Feed my sheep." Had Christ merely informed his apostle that he forgave him, assigning him no office, no act by which his love could be expressed, his restoration would have been

incomplete. Men sometimes forgive in this imperfect manner. They will promise to forgive a past offence, but they will not trust the offender for time to come. True reconciliation leaves no such suspicion or distrust. It confides. It returns his sword to the warrior. It renews his commission to the man who repents of his disloyalty. Believing that his repentance was sincere and his attachment strong, Christ restored his disciple without any reserve, assigning him a post of duty, and intrusting to him, as to the other apostles, the great interests of his church. This is something to be borne in mind for our imitation. Many a generous nature has been permanently and incurably injured by being denied the confidence which it craves. Parents harm their children through habitual distrust. Let us copy the wisdom of Christ, who, in forgiving, prescribed, as in fullest confidence, the very mode in which he who was forgiven could make proof of his love.

Nor was this the whole. Soldiers regard it always as the highest honor to be assigned to positions of the greatest peril. He who

is advanced to service at a most critical and important point, in the very face of death, feels himself promoted by the solemnity of the trust. Just this was what occurred on the occasion I am describing. Not only was Peter fully restored to office and duty, but he is distinctly informed of the sufferings which lie in that career, which is to be terminated by the honors of martyrdom. Christ does not invite his disciple to a life of ease and tranquillity. Neither Peter nor the sheep whom he was commissioned to feed were destined to repose in green pastures or beside still waters. Our Lord foretells in his hearing what will come to pass in his future life: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." We are not left to conjecture the meaning of this, for the evangelist immediately subjoins: "This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God." Our Lord—I will not say forewarns,

for it is an honor and a promotion, not a shame and degradation, of which he speaks; but he foretells to this earnest, cordial friend how much was implied in this protestation of attachment. He fully informs him of the cost at which his love will be attested. He describes the old age which was before him—not one of liberty and serenity, but of duress and helplessness, to be closed with crucifixion. When young, you girded yourself, just as you have now done, when you sprung into the sea, going where you liked; but the time will come when you shall be bound by the hands of an executioner, and your arms shall be extended upon the cross, dying painfully in proof of your love. Wonder not that John, who survived Peter so long, and who wrote this gospel many years after the martyrdom of his brother apostle, should have had this part of the conversation recalled to his mind most vividly, embodying it in his record. The true-hearted Peter did not shrink from the test. Such was now the sincerity of his love, that he was willing to prove it, not merely by feeding the flock of Christ, but by facing death

itself in its most terrific forms. And when Jesus had spoken this—with this explicit information of what was in certain prospect—he said to the penitent, restored, sincere, loving disciple, "*Follow me!*" The same words which were uttered in his hearing at the beginning of his discipleship, years before, when summoned from his nets as a fisherman, to be prepared as a fisher of men, are repeated now, with how much greater significance! Through death Christ had passed already; unto death; and through death the disciple was to be as his Master. This sublime command, in prospect of danger and imprisonment and martyrdom—"*Follow me!*"—opens the way to Peter to prove his love. He withdrew not his foot, he turned not back his eye, but lifted up that head which drooped once, once only, but which will droop no more, for his love is true and courageous as it is sincere.

Tradition reports that when, at the end of his glorious apostleship, Peter came to the cross as a martyr, he made request that he might be crucified with his head downward, regarding it as too great an honor that he

should be permitted to die in the same manner as his blessed Master.

One other thing was infused into this act of Peter's restoration, and his avowed purpose to follow the Redeemer. Apprized of his own mode of glorifying God by painful martyrdom, he very innocently and naturally inquired what was to be the history of his friend and companion, his fellow-fisherman, and now his fellow-apostle, John. "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? *Follow thou me?*" This remark, we are told, was misunderstood. The saying went abroad that John should not die at all. A good illustration of the origin of *traditions*, and of the little credit which should attach to them. This very tradition has had a wonderful longevity. Grave efforts have been made by men now living to prove that there must have been some truth in the old tradition of the church that John did not die even when he was buried, but that the earth of his tomb actually heaved with his continuous breathing; and so late as the time of Cromwell, there was a sect in England who

professed to believe that John was still alive, and that he would be manifested as the precursor of Jesus Christ at his final advent. The very letter of the passage proves the contrary of all this: "Yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come." Frequently had our Lord referred to his coming at the destruction of Jerusalem, the event which John actually lived to see, surviving it several years.

But we are wandering from the point. We cannot call it a vain and idle curiosity; yet something of curiosity there was in the question of Peter concerning his brother disciple; and this was rebuked. He was bidden to observe that he who enters upon the march of duty must not be diverted by side-issues, by any thing irrelevant. Matters there may be which concern others which do not concern ourselves. The world is full of objects which are unrelated to our personal duty. He who enters upon the service of Christ under the impulse of love should understand, when making the most of his life, that there may be ten thousand side-questions, of greater or lesser

interest, which ought never to divert thought or purpose from the one great vocation of a Christian disciple. "What is that to thee? Follow thou *me!*" Embarrass not your strength, weaken not your purpose, dilute not your power by entertaining questions which are in no wise related to your own duty; but make this intention to follow Christ one and indivisible, concentrating all the forces of existence into one decisive energy, and pressing on to its end, undiverted by trifles, undaunted by death.

Gathering up the several words and incidents of this conversation, we are in possession of a lesson most pertinent and valuable to ourselves. I have said already that we have here the test-question of our religion: "Lovest thou me?" Not only as the thought is expanded and reiterated by the same apostle in his subsequent epistles, that love is the essence of religion, but more than this, this love takes the form of personal attachment to the Redeemer, the living historic Person—unseen now, but not unknown—rather than a vague sentiment for universal being, dissolving away into a pantheistic haze. Jesus Christ,

in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily, is the central form in our religion; and he who loveth Him who is the expression of all love for us, is adopted into the family of the redeemed.

But how shall this love be demonstrated? After what method shall it be expressed? Not by secret musings alone; not by the chanting of religious sonnets alone; not by grateful remembrances of Him at his table only—but by deeds of love towards those who in a real sense represent him, because partakers of that nature, our common humanity, which he condescended to assume. The Shepherd himself is invisible now, but we prove our affection for him by kindness to his flock. Jonathan is dead, but Mephibosheth liveth, whom, for his father's sake, we may visit with acts of fondest gratitude. Whatever we do for man in Christ's name is as if it were done to Christ himself: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, ye did it unto me." "Lovest thou me?" "Feed my sheep." All around us, accessible to our living sympathies, with voice

and hand, are the objects which remind us of our Lord—his very members and body; and every act which is prompted by love towards them, will be regarded as a proof of love to him. Nor is this love an easy, unconscious emanation, as flowers diffuse an involuntary aroma; it demands an effort; and in its highest expression, always manifests itself in sacrifices and sufferings. It gives not only what costs nothing, but imitates the love of Christ for man, which cost him every thing. The eye of the penitent Peter, suffused with the tear of sorrow and glistening with the ardor of love, was directed to those heights of Christian affection which he was permitted to scale through the honors of martyrdom. So completely was self expelled from that love which now takes full possession of his soul. The cross, in the same literal sense, may not be in our path; but this quality of love, that it is willing to deny itself, to suffer in itself for the good of its object, is universal. As Christ so loved us, in the same manner we are to show our love for him: by deeds towards those who now represent him in actual life.

All other questions we may postpone. Whatever mere curiosity might suggest, we may defer. But at the close of the evangelists, the sealing up of the record of what Christ said and did, the finale of revelation, this is the one all-inclusive and critical question, "*Lovest thou me?*" Grateful should we be for every opportunity in which we may give proof of our affirmative response. Specially grateful should they be who, like this disciple, are conscious that they have hitherto often denied their Master; fallen into inconsistencies and defections most dishonorable; but who, like him, are also truly penitent, and ask for nothing so eagerly as to know the methods by which they may prove their newness of love; specially grateful and emulous should they be for all occasions and modes for expressing their attachment to their most gentle and forgiving Master.

"*Lovest thou me?*" All down through time, the question, in various ways, is presented to living souls. The human race is, and will be, divided by that one test. It will be uttered again from the throne of judgment, that throne

high and white, before which a disparted world shall pass to his right hand and his left. That throne will be occupied by the resplendent form of incarnate Love, and the destiny of every man will be, must be, as are his affinities in regard to Him. "Lovest thou me?" He that loveth is of God; and they who are like God shall be gathered to his bosom; while all that is contrary thereto is repelled as an incongruous element: "*Depart* from me; I never knew you." God grant, before that irrevocable decree, even now, often as the question meets us from our Lord, "Lovest thou me?" that we may be able humbly and heartily to say: "Yea, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that we love thee."

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